

Brain Health Breakthrough



Prepared by Flourish Together CIC

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Founder's Foreword

Karen Haworth founder of Brain Health Breakthrough CIC



With over 35 years of experience in the health and social care sector and adult education, I bring a unique blend of empathy, evidence, and innovation to my work. My approach is rooted in lived experience and strengthened by decades of professional practice.

Why I Founded Brain Health Breakthrough CIC

Throughout my career, I've consistently championed people experiencing health inequalities, especially those living with invisible illnesses and energy-limiting conditions and other disabilities. I saw a critical gap in support—too many people were falling through the cracks, overlooked by traditional systems.

In 2018, I launched Brain Health Breakthrough CIC to create bespoke wellbeing programmes that combine peer support, education, and practical recovery tools. We've worked hard to provide effective pathways for those who need support but aren't being reached by other services. "I initially began supporting individuals with brain injury, and during the pandemic, this work naturally expanded to include carers, children, young people, and those affected by Long COVID."

I'm delighted to share that our work at Brain Health Breakthrough has been honoured with the Women in Social Enterprise She-Inspires Award in Nov 2021. This prestigious award, which celebrates inspirational female leaders, is a testament to our team's unwavering dedication and the profound impact of our bespoke, holistic social model. It is a reassurance to our partners, funders, and community members of the quality and effectiveness of our services. Brain Health Breakthrough was also shortlisted for the micro-organisation awards at the We Are Power Awards 2023. This reflects our embedded practices in empowerment, inclusion, and choice for people from diverse backgrounds. We have become widely recognised for delivering a unique, blended approach that combines peer support, education, training, and one-to-one guidance — empowering individuals to turn adversity into hope



Inclusive Employment: Turning Lived Experience into Leadership

What I'm most proud of at Brain Health Breakthrough CIC is the inclusive culture we've created — where lived experience isn't just acknowledged, it's central to everything we do. Every

member of my team lives with a disability, which is a reflection of our community, and that is our greatest strength.

I've always believed in the inclusion of every ability, whether visible or hidden. That belief has shaped a working culture that is truly transformational — one that empowers each of us to thrive, not despite our conditions, but because of the understanding and support we offer one another.

By embedding lived experience into the heart of our organisation, we've built a flexible and compassionate environment — one that recognises fluctuating health and meets people where they are, every single day.



BHB is widely recognised for delivering a unique, blended approach that combines peer support, education, training, and one-to-one guidance — empowering individuals to turn adversity into hope



What Drives Me Now

I'm on a mission to:

- Share lived-experience expertise with employers and policymakers to ensure invisible disabilities are understood.
- Reframe recovery using a person-centred, step-by-step pathway that reduces stress and empowers self-management
- Scale our specialist training, helping every organisation support employees with energy-limiting conditions and benefit from their talent.

Our Next Steps

At Brain Health Breakthrough CIC, we're committed to showcasing the rich and diverse expertise developed through our lived experience and frontline work. The individuals who use our services often face hidden disabilities, complex health conditions, and energy-limiting illnesses. Their challenges are real — and too often misunderstood.

We believe this insight must be shared to:

- Influence policies at local and national levels
- Educate employers and communities
- Break down barriers that prevent access to work and meaningful participation in society

A lack of understanding remains one of the biggest obstacles — and we're here to change that.

Introduction and Executive Summary

Context and history to Brain Health Breakthrough CIC and this report

Brain Health Breakthrough CIC aims to bring communities together to build strong relationships, reduce social isolation, help people make friendships, and encourage individuals to be a part of their wider community. They aim to help people reach their potential through training opportunities and developing coping strategies to manage their mental health and well-being. Core target areas of focus are:

- to help those that have been affected by the pandemic, particularly those with long-COVID find a place and purpose where they can find help in coming to terms with their current circumstances.
- Support people with invisible disabilities, including Mental Health Needs and those with energy-limiting conditions
- Supporting a range of communities affected by Traumatic Brain Injury

Operating as a 'Lived Experience Led' Community Interest Company since 2018, all their staff have disabilities, and they champion equality and diversity by offering a transformational working culture that empowers by focusing on the Inclusion of every ability, making us stronger and more productive.

The organisation has evolved using a mixed-income steam model combining funded pilots using specialist practical and community-led expertise alongside highly qualified professional support and evolving these into commissioned services and volunteer led peer support groups, as well as supporting a range of private clients with therapeutic support and services.

Between 2019 and end of 2024, the organisation secured a combined income total of £158,448.00 which it used to impact communities across Lancashire and Cumbria, targeting those living with Long Covid, Mental Health support needs of all ages and those with invisible disabilities and energy limiting conditions. Additionally more than £11,190 was delivered in volunteer time and around £1000.00 a secured through "In Kind" Room Hire.

Overall 710 beneficiaries were directly supported, growing year on year totaling in the region of 348 unique individuals. Alongside 11 individual Staff and Trustees, 12 additional volunteers and 11 Student Placements, so **in the region of 382 people have been engaged. 149 people (49%) accessed repeat support for 2 years or more and 41 people (12%) accessed repeat support for 3 years or more.**

The tables on pages 6 and 7 give a year on year breakdown.

Key Findings from this report

Below are the key headlines and data relating to growth and development in recent years, ranging from income generation and diversification to, team growth and impact.

1) Income has grown steadily, however challenges across the landscape and breaking into new markets, commissioning and communities is still a challenge

Starting from humble beginnings prior to receiving Lottery funding Brainhealth Breakthrough has grown its income year on year from both wider funds and trading income. Whilst funding and income have more than doubled from what was achieved prior to Lottery Investment and combined income since the Lottery investment totals £125,035.38 (between 2021-2024) securing resources from funders and trading/commissioning routes remains a goal and challenge.

Year	Income from funds	Wider income	Total Income	Total beneficiaries
2019 - 2021 (pre RC)	6,189.00	3,242.90	9,431.90	100
	18,729.50	5,251.25	23,980.75	
2021-22	19,743.16	1,690.06	21,433.22	158
2022-23	41,430.00	8,558.89	49,988.89	202
2023-24	52,899.00	714.27	53,613.27	250
TOTAL	138,990.66	19,457.37	158,488.03	710

“Our strategy is to increase our trading income so we can re-invest in projects and have a greater impact on the communities we serve.”

Part of Brain Health Breakthrough’s strength is how they have built up a client base by delivering services online throughout the pandemic, which has kept outgoing costs low. This gave opportunity to develop and hone their skills organisationally and as a team in running peer support groups, developing digital materials and expanding commissioned services across several areas of Lancashire and into Cumbria with both individuals, groups, parents/carers and health/community professionals. Their flexibility, innovations and responsive adaptations have meant they have been able to meaningfully respond to the needs of their communities throughout the pandemic and beyond, plus create replicable tools, resources and services they hope to capitalise on in future with existing

groups, new communities and through funded and commissioned services with beneficiaries, carers and professionals alike.

2) Significant organisational growth and development, both in terms of jobs and opportunities created and a holistic and innovative approach to employment has been achieved

The organisation and staff team has expanded since their last report in 2021, due to an £xxk investment from the National Lottery amongst other funds, small contracts and traded income from:

Roles	2019-2021	2022	2023	2024
Core team	1 PT	1 PT	3 PT	4 PT
Associates	2	4	3	3
Student interns	0	1	5	5
Volunteers	1	4	3	4

This report looks at how service users, partners and the community engage with BHB what they value most and how this is impacting them most significantly, using a community led Social Value Indicator Framework designed as a result of Brain Health Breakthrough's first Social Value report commissioned in 2019-2021. The impact indicators developed as a result are below and they have since been used to measure the impact of programmes across the organisation

3) A broad range of impact reaching those in most need, at the earliest opportunity has been possible for those living with complex physical and mental health needs and wider intersectional challenges and hardship. Plus consistent support with communities others aren't reaching has been possible due to innovative community led and Lived Experience led approaches and compassionate, holistic support

Key Value Indicator List for Brain Health Breakthrough

- *Improved self-belief, ability to heal and make genuine progress*
- *Increased capacity to manage and reduce stress, anxiety, and mood*
- *Improved ability to use coping strategies and frame experiences into positive experiences*
- *Increased communication skills and assertiveness*
- *Increased knowledge and skills to develop self-care and improved mental health*
- *Increased awareness of services and support*
- *Empowered communities with lived-in experience*

A key survey completed by 38 people, across diverse members across our events, programmes and 121 support accessing support 2022-2025 showed that:

92% (35 people) reported significantly improved belief in themselves (38 responses)
84% (32 people) reported significantly improved ability to heal & make progress (38 responses)
80% (30 people) reported increased capacity to managed & reduce stress (38 responses)
82% (31 people) reported reduced anxiety (37 responses)
80% (30 people) reported increased improved mood day to day (38 responses)
82% (31 people) reported improved mental health & wellbeing (38 responses)
90% (34 people) reported increased positivity (38 responses)
76% (28 people) reported increased communication skills and assertiveness (37 responses)
87% (33 people) reported increased knowledge/skills to develop self-care strategies (38 responses)
82% (31 people) reported increased awareness of services and support available (38 responses)
92% (35 people) reported increased sense of energy to take action (38 responses)
84% (32 people) Increased sense of hope in the future (38 responses)
Increased connectedness to others in the community (could be online or in person) (38 responses)
87% expressed a level of relief that someone is listening and championing on behalf of those with long covid (38 responses)

A key additional aspect is that Brainhealth Breakthrough have been about to provide consistent and continuous support to people who clearly need ongoing support as 49% (169) of service users have accessed repeat and ongoing support for 2 years or more and 12% (41) have accessed support for 3 years or more.

4) Reaching Communities funding has enabled us to focus on a range of areas of growth and development:

1) A Summary of Step Change in relation to funding goals

Securing core resources through Reaching Communities enabled our organisation to consolidate and establish routes and pathways for growth. This included applying for and being successful on the SSE Trade Up programme as well as a range of other opportunities.

However external factors, including complex and additional health needs of the wider staff team and other life priorities, alongside an ever more competitive landscape in relation to funding, means a complete step change has not yet taken place.

Huge progress has been made in terms of the capacity of the team, increasing numbers of student placements and overall impact, however scaling this into wider funding, investment and commissioned work is still a challenge.

We find ourselves between a “Rock and hard place” sometimes both having track record and an evidence base for our work, however as policy priorities change and it is not always easy to be in the room or get invited to the table we are still navigating our most effective routes to funding and commissioning opportunities. We also have to prioritise which funds are going to be overallly admin intensive given capacity issues and needs of the team and align ourselves with those which are a good fit for our organisation.

2) A summary of Step Change and impact in relation to Projects / services and activities

The last 3 years have seen a significant step change in terms of our impact, growth of activities and programmes. The number of people we are engaging with annually has more than doubled, from 100 in 2019, to now over 250 people per year. Plus we have more than doubled our annual income from around the £20k mark in 2020 to over £50+ annually by the end of 2024.

There are ongoing challenges post covid, and with a key area of focus having been on supporting those with ‘Long Covid’ we have noticed a changing landscape which has both challenges and opportunities. However the Lottery funds have enabled us to truly listen to community needs, respond and adapt and to be here consistently when other services have disbanded post Covid. This has massively helped our organisation and marginalised individuals, with a diverse range of people dealing with stress, anxiety and invisible disabilities affecting people young and old. We have been able to create new services to respond, which were not running a few years ago. Wider effects have been a shift in beliefs and perceptions to the condition, helping people working to stay in work when living with a range of conditions and understanding how to navigate PIP budgets.

3) A Summary of Step Change in relation to organisational development goals

Investment from the Lottery and resources and adjustments built into wider commissioned work has, enabled the growth and sustainability of the team. We incorporated lots of wider training to the team both skills, wellbeing and wider CPD. Alongside this we improved and increased systems and internal capacity; ranging from introduction of Sharepoint, GDPR systems and our roles and responsibilities have become much clearer. We have developed new and innovative working methods and practice, including learning to create flexible patterns, reasonable adjustments which are the core of the organisations which has enabled us to create capacity to support people to manage and work with a range of conditions so that the services remains consistent in spite of health inequalities and continues for years to come.

4) Social value commitments and how they are unfolding

In 2021 we created our first Social Value report and developed a set of Key Value indicators (as listed on page 11) which have been further developed and tested over the past 3 years. These provide a flexible and consistent framework across our programmes, yet still provide opportunity for bespoke reporting and additions. Our commitment to providing social, emotional, environmental and economic impact is as strong as ever and we are listening carefully to our community and wider stakeholders to adjust impact indicators where needed, although we aim to keep consistency to be able to track and consistently communicate impact over time. Whilst the commitments remain current, the needs and wider context and audiences/communities of need are often changing.

Additional needs evolving across our communities currently include:

- The needs of people needing to leave work/not able to commit to work due to ill health
- The needs of those affected by the Menopause and Peri - menopause
- Medical Gaslighting of women

We will be observing carefully and carrying out wider research to see how our services, support and programmes can be adapted to meet such needs and help people most marginalised

Methodology to Research and Report

This is the second Social Impact and Value report following an initial report undertaken in 2021 which helped systemise how evaluation and impact is consistently recorded and reported, helped gather insights and learning on the impact a broad range of direct, indirect and wider stakeholders experience and observe, plus helped shape the initial bespoke Key Value Indicators Brain Health Breakthrough are recording their impact and progress against - alongside wider funder and programme priorities.

In terms of methodology we have looked at:

Historic information to refer to and refresh the context and history to Brain Health Breakthrough including creation of a Timeline overview showing key milestones including the National Lottery Reaching Communities programme of work and others to date and year on year

Current programme impact data, demographics of participants and findings from programme and activity evaluations to build a detailed picture of impact, value and evolving areas of focus, expertise and priority as well as repeat and longitudinal support of individuals

Services and Activities Impact Review - Looking at how partners and the community engage with BHB and what they value as well as Project to Project summaries analysing impact patterns, individuals impacted and seeking to quantify areas of value. Plus highlighting Key Milestones and areas of impact against Key Value Indicators

Referral Pathways and Partners - highlighting the range of partners, what they value about their interaction with BHB and the impact and value they notice in their communities, networks and clients

Impact Case studies from a range of beneficiaries across activities and programmes, will give holistic examples of how people's lives, wellbeing, skills and capacity and self worth are changing and improving as a result of Brain Health Breakthrough. Overall x feedback interviews have been analysed.

Key Value Indicators - testing and consistency

Throughout the following sections of review and summary we are using the original Key Value Indicators identified in the first social value exercise:

- *Improved self-belief, ability to heal and make genuine progress*
- *Increased capacity to manage and reduce stress, anxiety, and mood*
- *Improved ability to use coping strategies and frame experiences into positive experiences*
- *Increased communication skills and assertiveness*
- *Increased knowledge and skills to develop self-care and improved mental health*
- *Increased awareness of services and support*
- *Empowered communities with lived-in experience*

Summary timeline and key milestones including the Reaching Communities programme of work to date and activities year on year

Milestones 2021-24

Funder	Project		Team	Placements
Dept. of Health & Social Care £2500	Covid Recovery Project	2021		
Hyndburn Champions £9,070	Long covid support & community awareness	Feb	3 (1 PAYE/ 2 Associates)	0
Awards4All £10,000	TBI & unpaid carers support online peer support, 121 counselling	April		
SSE £2,000	Unrestricted grant	Oct		
Hyndburn & Ribble ICB CCG £4,000	Long covid support & community awareness	Nov		
		Dec		
		2022		
Dept. of Health & Social Care £4,000	Pegasus Project children & young people	Feb	5 (1 PAYE/ 4 Associates)	1
Unicorn grant £600	Pegasus Project children & young people	March		
Arnold Clark £1,000	Pegasus Project children & young people	Apr		
		May		
AFL £10,000	Adults Autism back-to-work support with student counsellors	Aug		
Hyndburn ICB £5,000	Pegasus Veterans	Oct		
Red Rose Recovery £2,000	Adults addiction wellbeing walks			
Reaching Communities £15,215	Lancashire Long Covid & Family Project	Dec		
HRCVS ICB £4,000	Pegasus Project children & young people	2023		
		April	6 (3 PAYE/ 3 Associates)	5
Reaching Communities £15,215	Lancashire Long Covid & Family Project			
AFL £10,000	Volunteer Coordinator post overseeing student counsellors & volunteers	June		
Reaching Communities £6,109	Lancs Long Covid & family project Staff Salaries uplift	Dec		
HRCVS ICB £4,000	Pegasus Project children & young people	2024		
		June	7 (3 PAYE/ 4 Associates)	5

Findings from survey and programme/activity evaluations

Brain Health Breakthrough offers a range of services with the aim of delivering 'Lived Experience Led' support, helping people to live well, with purpose and intention alongside living with chronic and energy limiting conditions. It also seeks to reduce social isolation and exclusion and give a voice to those living with such conditions. They also deliver high-quality training and practical peer support, education, online relaxation sessions, and one-to-one support. Plus a range of trainee and experience opportunities, for up-coming counselling and mental health support professionals.

Below is a summary of findings from evaluations from across individual programme areas and a wider survey sent to beneficiaries from across programmes:

Long Covid Peer Support Groups

The Long Covid Peer Support Group in Lancashire & South Cumbria is a fully funded online and in person support programme designed to assist with managing Long Covid systems more effectively. This is done by learning to listen to your body, slowing down, and learning from others in a similar situation. These sessions started in 2019 during the pandemic and have developed to provide both a targeted, consistent support service and a community of expertise on this evolving condition. The series of activities has expanded to include:

Why is this service needed and important?

According to a government report released in 2024, an estimated 1.9 million people in the UK reported that they were experiencing Long Covid, representing 2.9% of the population. Of these, 1.3 million had symptoms that had lasted for more than a year and 762,000 had symptoms lasting for more than two years. Oxford University also carried out research in 2024, published in The Lancet outlining that Long Covid can affect almost anyone, including all age groups and children. Highlighting the rate of Long Covid in the most deprived fifth of the UK population (3.2%) is more than twice as high as that in the least deprived fifth (1.5%). Women are slightly more likely than men to be affected. Whilst the ongoing complexity and prevalence of the condition is widely reported, attention and focus on supporting those with Long Covid is diminishing. Brain Health Breakthrough's support offers a unique point of expertise and continuity for a condition which as yet is under researched and has no identified treatment.

During 2019-2021 a regular group of 14 people were supported online, since investment and wider commissions this grew to 44 people in 2022, then 76 people in 2023 and 131 people were supported during 2024. Totalling 265 beneficiaries accessing interventions equating to just over half of BHB's beneficiary group. The service is highly valued as outlined overleaf.

Impact of Long Covid Support and Peer Group

265 beneficiary interventions during 2021- 2024 RC investment £52,934 and £17,070 wider funds and commissions.

Totaling £70,004 invested in Long Covid support.

Impact	Impact statements and evidence
100% of people agree that the Long-COVID peer-support group gave them somewhere safe to turn & somewhere to feel understood. People feel seen & have a voice whilst living with the condition	<p><i>"Most people don't understand, it's only those who have experienced the same issues of fatigue and lack of concentration that can offer the kind of support that is needed."</i></p> <p><i>"It's been so good and supportive to be able to meet with others struggling with this unique and poorly understood condition."</i></p> <p><i>"I have learned to better manage what I call my new "NORMAL", it is what it is, but different and very similar to other long Covid sufferers."</i></p>
Over 50% (?) of people are connecting and making friendships outside the group and benefiting from peer support within and beyond sessions	<p><i>"I find peer support is really good. The long-COVID peer support group has been a lifeline. It makes such a difference to be heard, understood, and validated by people who are going through a similar experience. It has made the experience much less scary. We are able to support each other because we really understand. The group sizes are good - enough people to be able to interact well and share experience, but not too many that it becomes tiring or overwhelming. There is always enough time for everyone to be heard. It is also good that we have WhatsApp and Facebook groups, for in-between sessions, so we can stay in touch and support each other."</i></p> <p><i>"The main benefit for me is that I don't feel alone in this. By talking to others who fully understand these crazy symptoms and how rubbish it is, really helps me feel supported. It's also made me meet some really lovely people."</i></p>
100% of people feel an increase in positive health, happiness and wellbeing in their daily lives.	<p><i>"All the BHB activities and support I have experienced have been incredibly supportive and empowering. As well as being a safe space to share, BHB provides tools and techniques for understanding and processing my emotions, and not only do I feel supported through life challenges, I feel I have been enabled to grow as a person. I love the eclectic selection of techniques that Karen practices. I have learnt a lot from the sessions and have been inspired."</i></p> <p><i>"I hope and pray this support group continues as I don't know what I would do without it. I always feel better about things and feel that there is hope that things will improve after a meeting ☐"</i></p>
People experience a reduction in social isolation	<p><i>"The group is non-judgemental and it has been a life-saving experience for me particularly when I am feeling isolated. I know I can turn to the group and towards people who understand their situation."</i></p> <p><i>"Until I found this support group, I had been isolated for well over a year knowing nobody else who had long-COVID. It's an absolute godsend to have others that understand fully and can help each other. It's an incredibly lonely illness at times, it can be fairly invisible to others not suffering with it. So to have the support of the group is invaluable! "</i></p>

<p>People need continuing support to aid condition management and develop peer led coping strategies</p>	<p><i>“I have been attending the Long-COVID Support Group for almost two years - having first been offered to attend it as a trial - and never looked back. Although I obviously hoped to be fully recovered by now, having a place to connect with like-minded people has been an invaluable support network. It has improved my mental health by giving me a space in which I'm able to voice some of the toughest aspects of this illness to others who 'get it', without feeling worried about their reaction. As a fellow long-COVID sufferer, Karen understands the need for a safe space, and creates an environment in which we can share safely. “</i></p> <p><i>“The relaxation audios at the end are perfectly timed, just as our energy is waning. We also share valuable tips and tricks for coping - another great example of the peer support model.”</i></p> <p><i>“I can try now not to spiral into depression and anxiety, this group has taught me strategies to cope sometimes.”</i></p>
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Pegasus Project

The Pegasus project started in 2022 to specifically work with children, young people and their families from varied backgrounds. The main aim was to support those who were suffering from mental health challenges and the effects of the pandemic - including anxiety, social isolation, educational barrier and wider physical health issues. This was a development from the Long Covid group, where parents highlighted their children also needed support.

The project ran for 2 years as a collaboration between Brain Health Breakthrough CIC and Spring Vale Farm, who came together sharing the same values, to offer children, young people, and adults participation-led opportunities.

The initiative evolved from a from a 12 week programme, to incorporate wider follow on support and a couple of 6 month programmes for both children / young people and also an adult group and Veterans. The sessions combined high quality self-reflection, confidence building and empowerment training alongside Equine Facilitated Learning. Plus wider activities in some programmes included:

- Rural Skills Sessions eg Basic Horse care and grooming (accredited)
- Work Based Learning - workplace skills in maintaining the farm/animals, health and safety. A couple of the young people progressed into work following this programme.
- Social Activities

In addition to supporting people through targeted wellbeing, empowerment and EFL support to children and Veterans, Family Support was offered to parents and carers through 121 s and signposting to wider support.

Why is this service needed and important?

The rationale for working with horses

Equine Facilitated Learning EFL is a participation-led activity where the person learns to gain trust with the horse, learning to regulate their emotions to become in tune with the horse. We provide Equine Facilitated Learning (EFL) with four rescued, previously neglected horses, who have already been trained to gain trust and confidence.

Equine Assisted Learning or Equine Assisted Psychotherapy is a non-traditional approach to psychotherapy that utilises horses as part of the therapeutic process to promote emotional growth and wellbeing. EFL promotes client awareness and discussion of their thoughts, feelings, and associated behaviours, enabling the development of self-awareness and others along the process. The aim of EFL is similar to traditional therapy in that a qualified mental health professional assists the client in understanding and managing their social, emotional, cognitive, or behavioural difficulties. Clients have the opportunity to process thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and associated patterns through these interactive activities, as well as build awareness and trust, stimulate problem-solving skills, and learn goal setting.

EFL has been adapted to treat a variety of disorders, including depression, anxiety and PTSD, evidenced to be beneficial across different age demographics. Horses are instinctively hyper-sensitive and attentive to subtle changes in mood and behaviours in their environment, which leads them to react depending on the way they are approached by the human, subsequently generating a mirroring effect. Due to the horse's ability to detect subtle changes in the environment, it becomes difficult for clients to display an inaccurate depiction of themselves.

The heightened need for this work with children and young people

In young people aged 16-34 there has been a significant rise in the number of reported mental health challenges, especially non-work-limiting conditions. This suggests a willingness amongst young people to disclose struggles and shows how there has been a positive culture shift towards normalising mental health discussions.

However, this increases the burden on the NHS, as there are more young people looking for help especially in more educated areas. Between 2020/21 and 2022/23, mental health referrals in children increased by over 50% — from 821,734 to 1,288,653.

In Lancashire, since 2013/14 the number of pupils permanently excluded from schools has risen by 24%. In 2021/2022, Lancashire's permanent exclusion rate was 0.08 per population meaning around 1 pupil in Lancashire was permanently excluded every day. This is significantly higher than the national figure which is 0.06 and 70% of permanently excluded children are found to have SEND needs.

Impact of Pegasus Project

56 individuals supported during 2021-2024, £23,500 wider funds and commissions were invested in this work in addition to our wider Reaching Communities investment. **Therefore a total of £23,500 invested in children/young people's and Veterans' support.**

Impact	Impact statements and evidence
100% improved their confidence and communication skills	<p><i>"The positive experiences she is having with the horses and learning to communicate and interact with others will influence her daily life. Coming to the farm and being with the horses is important to them and she loves coming. This is a success as she has previously been reluctant to participate in other activities."</i></p> <p><i>"Our 13 year old became withdrawn during lockdown and home life and relationships broke down, due to difficulties in communicating emotions. Following the programme communication and confidence has really improved and together we are making good progress."</i></p>
50% have found they can express themselves more calmly and clearly to help others better understand their needs	<p><i>"He is a quiet boy with Autism and suffers with anxiety especially in unfamiliar surroundings, so for him to be so vocal and asking questions was brilliant to see. We was smiling and engaging with the others which again was unlike him. He has recently moved to a new school which has made a huge difference to him but again credit to you guys for making him feel safe and confident."</i></p> <p><i>"I feel less alone in this, I feel like I have friends who understand."</i></p>
73% reported progress and positive changes with 23% reporting changes across 4 or more areas (eg. behaviour/ confidence/ wellbeing / communication)	<p><i>"Through her sessions at the farm, her independence and confidence have significantly grown. She has been able to transfer her new skills into her home life, coping with her anxiety in school and communicating more effectively, and she has utilised these life skills to set herself on a good track for the future."</i></p> <p><i>"These visits were undoubtedly a circuit breaker that prevented a very serious decline in my daughter's mental health and behavioural issues. It helped me to get some rest and not feel so alone and guilty watching my little girl in pain. I knew she was well cared for and enjoying herself. The Neighground was the first time she had smiled in a while."</i></p>
38% have gained work skills and experience	<p><i>"Following the programme, I have gained a 30 hour week job at MBDA in Bolton, this is exactly what I wanted as a job - cleaning, tidying and some gardening involved. They were interested in what I learned on the Rural Skills course and this was rleevant . I think this contributed to me securing this job" - 19 year old participant</i></p> <p><i>"It gave me my final push into employment about 2 months after I finished the course provided by Brain Health Breakthrough. It boosted my motivation into work." 19 year old participant</i></p>

<p>31% have tried something new during and post programme</p>	<p><i>“Following the programme they set her own goals to overcome various fears and anxieties, so they are able to undertake activities. This has helped build her confidence and her mum is very impressed with this progression, and says that she is able to undertake new tasks at home independently.”</i></p> <p><i>“Firstly from our point of view, the session was so relaxed and welcoming for the group, which made the group feel comfortable and safe.</i></p> <p><i>Comments from group included; 'Can we go again'/'I want to go back'/'I loved it'/'it was brilliant. Being able to signpost to new and wider activities has been very positive.’ - Partner Agency, Hyndburn Young People’s Services</i></p>
<p>31% have experienced improved communication with their families</p>	<p><i>“Through the EFL sessions at the farm, they have begun to feel more relaxed and over the weeks saw a progression in positive behaviours and an improved relationship with her mum. This continued in their home life, they were spending time together and she was spending less time isolated in her bedroom.”</i></p> <p><i>“These visits were undoubtedly a circuit breaker that prevented a very serious decline in my daughter's mental health and behavioural issues. It helped me to get some rest and not feel so alone and guilty watching my little girl in pain. I knew she was well cared for and enjoying herself. The Neighground was the first time she had smiled in a while.”</i></p> <p><i>“As a parent, I fully support and advocate for this creative therapy offer, I strongly believe more young people could benefit from such a unique approach to managing mental health or respite from being at home.”</i></p>
<p>100% of people feel an increase in positive health, happiness and wellbeing in their daily lives.</p>	<p><i>“The sessions have helped her to be able to communicate how she is feeling and have broken down some of the barriers, that were built over lockdown. Since the project they are now going to Gym with their mum and openly talking about her issues and no longer feels the need to self-harm anymore.”</i></p> <p><i>“As a parent I fully support and advocate for this creative therapy offer, I strongly believe more young people could benefit from such a unique approach to managing mental health or respite from being at home.”</i></p>

Student Counselling and Experience

Brain Health Breakthrough CIC provides person-centred counselling delivered by counselling students who are registered with the BACP. Their work is supervised by our Counselling Coordinator, a qualified and experienced counsellor.

We also deliver education and training to our groups, focusing on self-care strategies, fatigue management, and pacing. Our sessions include the use of mindfulness techniques to manage symptoms and improve overall health and wellbeing. In addition, we teach methods for reducing anxiety and regulating the nervous system to support long-term recovery.

To enhance BHB support and add capacity to the team, BHB have developed relationships with the Health and Social Care Education departments at Blackburn University and Bolton University, taking on counselling and integrative therapy students at both undergraduate and post graduate levels. This provides a unique and tailored enhanced learning and extra-curricular service where a win-win relationship and outcomes are created.

We recognised early on the impact of long-term health conditions on mental health and are well aware personally and professionally of the gaps in counselling provisions, the long wait times and suitability and appropriateness of services to individual needs. In response, we developed a one-to-one counselling service, delivered by supervised student counsellors. This compassionate, person-centred space enables people to talk, be heard, and begin their emotional recovery. In some cases, our counsellors have helped individuals take the first step toward more in-depth NHS mental health support.

We are an approved placement provider and placements/ experience are brokered. We support students through placements to complete their 100 hour mandatory learning as part of counselling courses typically over 10 -12 months. Most students work with a wide variety of our beneficiaries, who opt in for counselling support across our programmes - this gives them exposure to highly diverse clients (details).

Between 2022 - 2024 we have supported 11 Student Interns to complete over 361 hours of counselling across 39 individuals costing at £10/hr this totals in excess of £3,610.00.

This breaks down as follows per student counsellor:

Student	Total hours	Total clients	Average hrs/client
F	38	3	12.6
Im	15	2	7.5
S	58	9	6.4
Is	74	4	18.5
N	25	4	5
An	24	3	8
Ja	20	4	5
Jy	39	3	13
K	36	3	12
R	32	4	8
TOTAL	361	39	9

There is benefit for both Students and Clients through this model, not least the insights and skills application and knowledge development student's gain, alongside clients having more timely support and a longer intervention period in some cases clients accessed more than 8 hours of support.

Student Placement Feedback.....

"I learnt how to refine my listening skills, also feel I have had a massive insight into long covid and on mental health as well as physical health and also the impact on the families and personal relationship, it has given me a deeper understanding of long term illness." – Student

"I enjoyed working with impact on personal relationships and family dynamics, plus it opened my eyes to how resilient some of the clients were given their experiences." - Student

"I would recommend Brain Health Breakthrough to go for placement, its very rewarding seeing an improvement in mental health and self-esteem in clients, even though you can't change their illness or situation, just being heard massively helps." - Student

121 Counselling from Student Placement Client Feedback.....

"It was really good and the counsellor was a good support and very easy to trust and engage with. I have tended not to trust people and open up, but she was able to build up trust and I felt relaxed about opening up."

"I needed to talk openly and honestly with someone re how I was feeling. Since the counselling I have been learning to accept my Neurodiversity and have even changed job after reflecting."

"I accessed the support due to a lack of confidence, anxiety caused by Long Covid. I am now more confident and have had support and suggestions as to how I can reduce my anxiety."

Family Support

In addition to peer support, therapy and wider services to those directly affected by a range of needs, Brain Health Breakthrough CIC has evolved and found ways to continue to provide comprehensive, wrap-around care for families affected by Long COVID, brain injury, and chronic illnesses. This work has also included close collaboration with the Pegasus Project to support young people and families holistically.

Our support includes:

- One-to-one emotional support
- Well-being checks
- Crisis intervention
- PIP referrals and navigation of external services
- Support for carers and partners of those living with long-term conditions
- Training for carers
- Safeguarding family support
- Young people's access to education and workplace mentoring

A snapshot survey of 10 family beneficiaries (5 men, 5 women with the majority aged 50+) who accessed a combination of counselling, 121 and peer support shows people accessing support for a variety of reasons including Anxiety, Grief, Loneliness, chronic health conditions and recovery needs. Some feedback and impact statements are given below:

"I am more confident and have had suggestions as to how I can reduce my anxiety Support has been excellent and non-judgmental."

"I needed help and now feel more hopeful and less isolated and have gained perspective, learning the importance of acceptance."

"I would recommend anyone to be brave and try it. I avoided talking therapy for 30 years because I was scared. Now, I see it as a "brain cleanser" and the opportunity to stop worries going round internally."

Brain Injury Group

The organisation first started as group for those affected by Traumatic Brain Injury and although not significantly funded to carry out this work, Brain Health Breakthrough is committed to providing regular support for our ongoing group and attracting new members who often go on to access other services we offer. This twice monthly online support group has run between 2019 - 2024 and the only investment in this area of our work has been a £10,000.00 Awards for All (2020_2021).

The key elements and activities include: Peer support, practical tips on managing the condition and life adaptations, awareness of biology and body systems and holistic support including meditation. This is all delivered by leaders with lived experience.

We help individuals grow in confidence after the challenges of brain injury and support each other by sharing advice and experiences. We understand some of the frustrations people face in the local community when living with the effects of brain injury. Our group ensures people can be with people who understand their situation and learn skills and strategies in this friendly and supportive group. Feedback from a group member is given below:

"I do find this form of peer support very useful as I feel it's full of helpful advice from people with similar struggles. My main turning point was actually not feeling so alone and embarrassed about my injury, I have now gained some advice on how to try and deal with bad days or daily tips to help, and relaxation techniques which I never knew about."

"The group and meeting others has been a lifeline. The meditation in each session has been really helpful. The support and encouragement from group member is also great."

Services and Activities Impact Overview

Long Covid Support Group

Brain Health Breakthrough has been educating people with Long-COVID about their body symptoms and how to manage their energy with pacing techniques. Incorporating a mindfulness education program to build mental resilience and offer coping strategies to encourage positive choices. Weekly peer to peer sessions enable members to support each other to be empowered in advocating their needs to employers, health professionals, friends & family.

People supported: 300+
Resources raised and invested:
Volunteer hours: 80 @£10hr £800

Counselling and 121 therapies

Brain Health Breakthrough run a range of bespoke person centred, talking therapies to a wider audience than those on their programmes, as well as potential follow on support for beneficiaries.

People supported: 83 Hours of support: 400+
If costed at £60 a session = £4980

Support, Experiences and Training for Volunteers/Students

BHB offers work placements to enhance and enrich Student learning, to date it has delivered partnership work with Blackburn University and Bolton University. 11 Students have been supported between 2022-24

People supported: 39 Hours of support: 361
Sessions ran 2019-2024: 361
Volunteer hours 361 @£10hr = £3610.00

Pegasus Project – Equine Assisted Learning & Therapies for young people/adults

A dedicated programme supporting those suffering from mental health challenges and the effects of the pandemic - including anxiety, social isolation, educational barrier and wider physical health issues. The sessions combined high quality self-reflection, confidence building and empowerment training alongside Equine Facilitated Learning. Plus incorporated Rural, Skills, Work Based Learning and Social Activities

People supported: 56
Resources raised and invested: £23,500.00
Volunteer hours: 30hrs @£10hr £300

Brain Injury Peer Support Groups

Lived experience led groups provide weekly sessions enabling people to come together for mutual support, to share coping strategies to live well with Acquired Brain Injury as well as influence and improve research and support plus help people to have a voice with this condition.

People supported: 69 Hours of support: 120
Sessions ran 2019-2024: 120
Volunteer hours: 150 @£10hr £1500

Drop-in Family Sessions

Wider additional 121 support and tailored support and signposting is provided ad hoc to families and careers of those on BHB programmes eg Long Covid/Pegasus/Brain Injury 'Family Support

People supported: 24

Organisational Strengthening

Since securing Reaching Communities funding, we have **strengthened our organisation in a range of areas including; financial sustainability and resilience, governance development, staff/volunteer training and CPD activities**

This resource has enabled us to develop our team, implement systems including HR, increased finance systems and software, develop induction and training for the staff team.

We secured a place on the SSE 12 month Trade Up programme (2022- 23) which added focus and additional time to shape our business and strategy, plus helped us make additional connections both locally and across the North West. In particular we co-created a project with a fellow participant on the programme which **extended our services to support those affected by DVA.**

However, our team have faced a range of health challenges, personal circumstances and coupled with a highly competitive and complex funding/commissioning landscape post pandemic with cost of living crisis focus it has been a difficult time to grow an organisation like ours with ever growing need, capacity challenges to navigate and a complex sustainability model to secure. **We have grown numbers and provision, but income and turnover wise, finding new income opportunities including trading and commissioning has been lacking and a challenge.**

Through this period **we have used the Lottery resources to consolidate our work**, services and team. We are proud that we employ a staff team who also live with energy limiting conditions and have become experts at this, **plus developed innovative practices in order to create an Inclusive Workplace and contributing towards and authentic Inclusive Economy.** Staff have needed extra support and supervision as well as wellbeing check ins to manage how we are personally affected in meeting the needs of our community - be they health setbacks, hardship, discrimination or challenges in the workplace. This takes extra time and capacity which isn't financially accounted for, creates additional time and resource needs on the Managing Director and affects the capacity for overall business development.

In spite of this **our biggest gains in partnership development have been:**

Lancashire & Authority Cumbria Foundation Trust handing over their Long Covid Clients to our care and support and whilst not commissioning us, they are supportive of our bids/proposals elsewhere and act as references on our bids. This is thanks to our expertise and trust which has been built with this community – they know we're a safe pair of hands.

We have also created 10 "In kind" partnerships with a range of community venues including Bamber Bridge Methodist, Blackburn Network Hub, Darwen Town Hall and local cafes in order to keep overheads down, whilst build connection and reduce isolation.

Plus we have created Community led innovation, unique products and services informed by those who need them and have nowhere else or limited options to turn to. These are now ripe for development and taking to the right commissioners, clients and audiences.

Referral Pathways and Partners

“Working together means no-one falls through the cracks – every referral finds the right door.”

Partnerships & Referral Network

We collaborate across **Lancashire & South Cumbria** so people with energy-limiting conditions receive seamless, wrap-around support. See [Appendix 1](#) for our network of referral partners and community venues at the time of publishing this report. Different partners play their part either as referral partners, commissioning partners, offering up safe spaces and venue and also form part of our wider network of partners to signpost people to. Below a range of core partners are highlighted.

Signposting & onward referral agencies

In order to create holistic wrap around support. it is crucial that we cultivate a broad network of onward referral partners. These span a wide range of services due to the diverse nature of the people we support. Including Age UK. Citizen's Advice, Recovery organisations, thematic mental health support and peer groups

NHS & Primary-Care Partners

Partners across a range of statutory physical and mental health teams refer into Brain Health Breakthrough. Currently 9 partners refer their clients and service users to Brain Health Breakthrough for a broad range of services. These include Long Covid teams, Social Prescribing Link Workers, Medical practices and Employability and Skills Support providers.

Community Venue Partners

We currently work with more than 10 community venues offering 'Rooms in Kind' where we hold our groups and activities. These range from community hubs and centres, to coffee shops and church halls.

Wider VCSE Partners

Several community agencies refer people to our services and support our work. These include Hyndburn & Ribble Valley CVS, Red Rose Recovery, Selnet and local groups.

Impact Case studies

BHB Case Studies

A range of beneficiaries across activities and programmes, bring impact stories and journeys to life highlighting the holistic ways in which BHB improve people's lives, wellbeing, skills and capacity and self worth and the progress they are making as a result. These are clustered into:

Long Covid Impact Case Studies....

1:

JS first came across BHB at the end of an occupational therapy course for those with long covid when information about BHB's coffee and chat sessions was given to them as a way to continue their support. Since finding out about this, she has regularly attended the monthly sessions and has now started doing a support training certified course. The monthly support sessions have worked really well for her, the monthly format makes them much more manageable to attend than other groups she's found. *"The content of the sessions themselves have also been very beneficial, whilst you don't have to chat about covid based things, it's nice that everyone there understands what daily life is like and they can relate to one another. They also often compare notes with things they've found that have helped them such as hiring mobility scooters at National Trust properties."* There was a real turning point for her when she realised that this group focused more on learning to live with long covid and the day-to-day symptoms, unlike occupational therapy which had a focus on recovery, which for many people never happens. She always looks forward to the monthly meetups and has found it so valuable to talk to people in the same position as her.

2:

LJ is part of the online covid support group. She was referred to the group when it was run by South Cumbria Health Trust and then Karen and BHB came and took it over. She finds that the group makes a positive impact in her life as everyone is respectful, there's never any arguments, and the discussions are often entertaining and well led. They also have a WhatsApp group so they can have even more conversations. They stay in touch regularly through the WhatsApp group, there's always someone there, even if it's the middle of the night. The group chat also allows them to continue conversations they maybe didn't have time for too. This was something that was introduced by BHB and they all really value it. One of the things she found most surprising was that the majority of BHB staff have all suffered with long covid and that makes a massive difference as they actually understand. Since joining the groups LJ's confidence in meeting new people has improved, the online group does still have an element of safety though which she also likes. It's good to be with a group of people who understand as it reduces her frustrations and gives her hope that somewhere down the line she may get some normality back.

"The group is very valuable as everyone there has knowledge to some extent of what each other are going through, and since we're all at different stages of their journey, people can provide advice and support to each other."

3:

RB accesses BHB services after having a massive brain injury three and a half years ago that landed him in a coma and caused him to lose everything, his house, job, dogs, and fiancée. He usually just finds it good to communicate with someone for a change whilst at sessions. Whilst he hasn't improved and still feels he wants his old life back he does know that this just isn't possible and BHB sometimes helps.

“It's sometimes nice to talk to people with similar injuries.”

4:

CR saw something in a Facebook group for those with long covid so started attending BHB's peer support groups. Since last year she has also been working as a co-facilitator for the group and currently does five hours a week. Her main role is hosting zoom meetings, making sure no medical advice is given, ensuring smooth running, and that all participants have the chance to speak. As a beneficiary, the most valuable thing was the support since she felt as if she was the only person facing these issues. It was helpful to receive education on long covid and its symptoms, as was a safe space to connect with others in a similar situation. Working for BHB has also helped her regain part of her identity as she loves helping people but lost her previous job. She can only manage this job since BHB is so supportive and encouraging and she still gets a massive benefit from being a co-facilitator due to the evolving learning and connection. She's even met people in the group she's become really good friends with and they stay in touch outside of the group too. Talking to other people helps CR to have those lightbulb moments, from figuring out what a symptom is to realising you need to try something different, it just feels very transformative to feel heard.

She's seen many people grow from attending the group, especially in regards to advocating for themselves in a medical setting, you can see that they use the tools and information BHB has given them. She has changed some things about her life now, from changing little things about her day-to-day life to make it more manageable, to listening to her body more with the help of Karen's meditations, it helps with acceptance and not feeling the need to look back to who they used to be and continuing to move forward. The validation and support she has felt from this group has been amazing and she still learns things now as a co-facilitator. CR's daughter has also benefited from BHB by being a part of the Pegasus project for children with parents with long-covid. Between that and some 1-2-1 sessions with Karen, her mental health had improved massively.

“BHB feels like a massive safety net that gives people the tools to advocate, feel less isolated and more empowered.”

5:

JJ first met Karen at a leadership course a few years ago but was referred to BHB from the long covid team. She attends zoom sessions at least once a month and is in the WhatsApp group too. She contacted Karen when applying for PIP and BHB referred her to the Welfare Rights Service who really supported her. She joined the Manchester group first and loves the zoom calls, finding them very supportive. One of the things she needed most was to talk to other people about how

they were coping, she was finding it especially difficult to balance work with long covid. There was no medical help available but BHB was there. Whilst the zoom calls are often sad they're also really supportive and a brilliant space to be able to talk to others, she knows that she'll be heard there. It's a real shame the Manchester group is closing because of NHS funding ending. The groups are really well managed and everyone has a chance to speak, which can often be difficult as the numbers are always changing but BHB handles it really well. The group helped Jane to feel the permission to leave work, she realised that before she had just been running off adrenaline. The sharing of resources has been really useful, especially in terms of monitoring heart rate variability and learning how to pace, it really helps her understand how much energy she's using. Since joining the group, her mental state has drastically improved and she's beginning to accept her life with long covid, she has also made some physical improvements.

6:

SS did her counselling placement at BHB after finishing her degree in Psychotherapy and Counselling and afterwards, Karen asked her to work as volunteer coordinator for student volunteers on their counselling placement. Having counselling clients with long covid made her realise that she had long covid herself so it's been a bit of a journey. On a personal level, it's taught her more about herself and brought her together with others facing similar challenges. She finds the groups very informative and supportive, more so than the medical professionals. It's also helped her understand her clients with long covid more. On a professional level, she's counselled clients with long covid and people who've had strokes, and she also does wellbeing checks if there's a waiting list for counsellors. Having been on placement and also having long covid, she can now train the student volunteers and they can get skilled up much quicker: there's a lot of terminology around long covid and it's taught her how she can teach students on presenting issues. The big issue for many people is accepting their new way of life and their new body and even she's still learning. The WhatsApp groups are also very active and supportive. The group is amazing. There are people there with similar problems which takes away her doubt. Learning coping strategies is so essential, as is getting support and recognition. With BHB, everyone is seen as a whole person, rather than a list of symptoms and that makes them feel more understood.

The breathing exercises and understanding pacing more have helped with SS's fatigue. Before starting as a trainee counsellor, she felt as if she was in limbo and didn't know what was happening to her but BHB made everything click for her and she still has those moments all the time. She's currently doing the group peer support training which is giving her the confidence to go out there and do it herself and applying what she's learned.

Pegasus Project Impact Case Studies.....

1) My daughter attended sessions at Adventure Neighbourhood with Kathryn and Karen. I cannot sing their praises enough.

My daughter is 13 years old. She is deaf and wears hearing aids, something she is very self-conscious about and tries to hide from others. She has very low confidence outside her small family and friend group. We have always had a close relationship up until lockdown. My 11-year-old little girl went from my carefree, childish, funny little sidekick; to a moody teenage recluse, wanting to spend all day in her dark bedroom. Her mental health took a nosedive. I would put this down to not having her peers around her in school; having no purpose or structure during the days without the routine of school; and hitting puberty alone.

I tried everything to get my daughter to open up and communicate with me, but I felt she has closed down. Her emotions were all over the place and I never knew which side of her I would be getting from one moment to the next. I found signs she had been self-harming and I organised an appointment with a councillor. My daughter flatly refused to talk about or consider attending the appointment. We had tears, refusal, shouting and when I could see how much extra anxiety it was causing, I cancelled the appointment.

In the meantime, I came across horse therapy. My daughter loved her trial session. It felt calm and non-confrontational. My daughter encouraged me to join the session with her and it felt nice to be included in something together. At our first session, I noticed it was the first time in over 2 years that I had seen my daughter act like a 13-year-old little girl again. She burst with pride as one of the ponies chose to let her lead them. She smiled, giggled and it was heart-warming to see.

I know from other parents that my daughter is not alone in suffering from anxiety and mental health. I believe that the extraordinary circumstances of lockdown will have had an impact on many young children and adults. After only 2 hours, Horse Therapy has opened-up my daughter and given us something to talk about. It is the only therapy option she has not only considered but has also looked forward to.

I would fully support and advocate for this creative therapy offer as I strongly believe more young people could benefit from such a unique approach to managing mental health or respite from being at home.

I really look forward to the next session I attend with my daughter. I would be happy to be contacted or give any further information to support an application for funding. I hope the team can continue to offer this to others and I have no doubt that there will be many breakthroughs with other young children. **-Parent of Horse Therapy sessions**

2) is a 14 year old girl, who lives in Accrington. She currently struggles with a number of issues, including: Anxiety and trauma that limits her access to education, DiGeorge syndrome, hearing

impairment, asthma, and negative impacts to her well being associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through her sessions at the farm, her independence and confidence have significantly grown. She has been able to transfer her new skills into her home life, coping with her anxiety in school effectively, and has utilised these life skills to set herself on a good track for the future.

She has set her own goals to overcome various fears and anxieties, so she is able to undertake activities with the horses. This has helped build her confidence and her mum is very impressed with this progression, and says that she is able to undertake new tasks at home independently.

3) is 6 years old, she lives in Accrington with her mum and dad and was referred into this service through Brain Health Breakthrough CIC, who are supporting her dad who has long-COVID.

3 and her family have been majorly affected by the pandemic, experiencing loss and grief when her mum lost her dad on 14th May 2020 to COVID-19 and the, sadly, her head teacher also died unexpectedly because of a heart condition in January 2021. She has not been able to return to school since, as it reminds her of her head teacher - who she was close to. She has been unable to enter buildings and is afraid of being close to people, whereas before COVID-19, EJ was a bubbly child, with lots of friends, who loved school.

A referral was made to a clinical psychologist during 2020 who explained 3 was suffering trauma and it would take a long time to heal. They did not recommend any regression therapy because of their age and because the trauma was still being triggered due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions.

The school worked with the family to slowly integrate 3 back into school from September 2020 until present. Before working on the Pegasus Project in December 2021, she would not enter any buildings - to the extent that a doctor had to come out of the health center to give her a flu vaccine outside. Before COVID-19, she had issues surrounding food and would only eat certain foods, unfortunately, this has only become worse during this period.

During her sessions at the farm, she has related to the project facilitator really well and has been happy to enter both a porta cabin and the barn. She has interacted with horses and been okay with volunteer stable people coming in and out of the barn. We have given extra support to her mum, which has resulted in the family considering homeschooling.

Additional improvements for 3 since taking part in the Pegasus Project include:

Trying different foods, actively choosing which foods she is going to try and voicing this.

Smiling, feeling happier and talking in more animated ways

She will enter buildings, help with shopping and has started to engage in her local community.

She is now engaging with physical with other children outside at school.

She is voicing her needs and her thoughts. She is choosing when she wants to be brave and is pushing her boundaries. Her parents are seeing improvements in many different ways, and they feel more relaxed as they are seeing the Equine Facilitated Learning is working.

Student Placement Case Study....

In 2024, Annie Kerr, a student at Blackburn University, joined Brain Health Breakthrough CIC for a counselling placement as part of her course requirements. Annie aimed to gain counselling hours to support her academic studies while enhancing her professional development and gaining real-world experience.

During her placement, Annie worked with three clients, delivering a total of 26 hours of support. The experience offered valuable insights into the complexities of working with individuals affected by Long COVID, chronic illness, and the broader impacts on mental and physical health. From her placement survey, Annie shared:

"I learnt how to refine my listening skills. I also feel I have had a massive insight into Long COVID and on mental health as well as physical health, and also the impact on families and personal relationships. It has given me a deeper understanding of long-term illness."

"I enjoyed working on the impact of personal relationships and family dynamics."

Annie's reflections highlight the value of placements that offer exposure to trauma-informed, holistic support models for people living with invisible illness. Her experience not only enhanced her counselling skills but also deepened her empathy and understanding of the systemic challenges faced by those with complex health needs.