ANNUAL REPORT 2025/2026

The Furzedown Project

Overview of our members & volunteers

The Furzedown Project provides older people with opportunities to connect, contribute and be active – tackling isolation and improving well-being.

- We have **411 members**: a 17% increase in membership since 2025.
- **69%** of members are aged over **70,** and **30%** are aged over **80.**
- **73%** of members are female & **27%** are male.
- **63%** of members are white. **37%** are from Black, Asian or other ethnic backgrounds.
- **82%** of members identified as heterosexual and **18%** identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another sexual orientation.

(Figures as at 21st July 2026)

ACTIVITIES

There are currently **25 weekly** group sessions and **8 monthly** activities at the Project, alongside the home visiting outreach service.

Our marvellous Volunteers

A big THANK YOU to all our wonderful volunteers, supporting our activities, events, outreach services and the day-to-day running of the Furzedown Project.

Alan Feast
Alan Hollamby
Alan Wells
Andrew Brown
Angie Stephenson
Anita Carlton
Anita Mistry
Ann Ziegler
Anne McCall
Anthony Buffery
Barbara Bunby
Bernadette Alexis
Camilla Duncan
Caroline Mitchell
Carolyn Krause
Christel Geater
Christine Palmer
Daphne Matthews
David Harbord
David Hart
Debbie Morey
Diane Norman
Eleanor Macer
Eniko Orosz
Ferdous Rahman
Frances Appleby
Gillian Mires
Howden Insurance
Ian Williams
Imelda Salazar
Indumati Patel
Jacqueline Anderson
Janet Blencowe
Jean Marc Rougeon
Jennifer Tolaram
Jo Patterson
Joan Poole
John Carragher
John Valentine
Joy Ullah
Judi Gasser
Julia Court
Julia Jossa
Kamla Cotter
Kanta Vadukul
Kristen Jamieson
Linda Dalton
Linda Wilson
Liz Richards
Liz Sines
Louise Lesage
Lucinda Denning
Marion Woodward
Martin Beaver
Martin Ure
Martine Davies
Maureen Sandhu
Maxine Rhodes
Mehdi Shakarchi
Michael Hewitt
Michelle Bennett
Moira Harbord
Natasha Kahn
Nayana Patel
Netty Turner
Nuno Camara
Parveen Akhtar
Patricia Orlando
Pauline Copas
Penny Newman
Peter Clarke
Rachel Bickley
Rachel Perkins
Robert Liston
Rosemary Scott
Sandra Crooks
Sarah Moloney
Sinead Dineen
Silvana Emmanuel
Simon Cruer
Simon Hill
Simon O'Leary
Stephan Ford
Stephen Potter
Sunanda Rajan
Susan Howard
Suzanne Ellis
Tara Lehmann
Terry Sines
Tim Kahn
Valerie Jackson
Velma Dennis
Vito Ward
Yvette Ramagge
Yvonne Mason
Zoltan Szigen

BOARD of TRUSTEES

Liz Sayce: Chair | Graham Loveland: Vice Chair | Prasantha Sugunasingha: Treasurer
Sue Pearson; Su Wardrop; Jeff Pickering; John Bartholomew; Marion Lesage

CHAIR'S REPORT

This year we asked our members how they saw the impact of the Project on their lives – and you can see the results in the pages of this report. 96% of our members – most of whom are over 70, many over 80 - said they had developed connections or friendships through involvement in the Project.

We all know how easy it is to get isolated as we get older, and many wrote movingly about how the Project had helped them get past an experience of loneliness, sometimes linked to bereavement or ill-health. Many described feeling so much better for contributing, knowing they had value in offering skills and practical support in a myriad of different ways, from setting up groups to fundraising and reception.

We as older people are all too often seen just as people needing support – but not at the Furzedown Project, where people are making a difference with and for others into their 80s and 90s.

This is all about providing opportunities for older people to **connect, contribute and be active.** We know that isolation is as bad for our health as smoking or excessive drinking – and the Project creates a community where people have a good time, support each other and get involved in whatever interests them, from Zumba to chair-based exercise, from bridge to bingo, from book group to older LGBT group – and so much more.

As someone said to me recently, every area needs a Furzedown Project. People working in the health service and social services have a priority to help people stay in their own homes as long as possible, to prevent unnecessary hospital and care home admissions and to give people tools to look after their own well-being. The Furzedown Project shows what this kind of prevention can do: providing a space, a community, where we as older people support our own and each other's well-being.

The Project has had a good year. Membership has grown to over 400 and we have been able to use our new accessible minibus - bought last year thanks to fantastic support from local people and funders - to ensure people with mobility challenges can take part in the Project's activities.

It's a privilege to chair this vibrant organization and work alongside a talented Board of Trustees, including 2 new Trustees this year. We have kept a close eye on finance and fundraising and I'm pleased that we have ended the year with sufficient financial reserves, with a small deficit position for the year. This is thanks to the work of our great fundraising volunteers and staff team. However, the fundraising environment is getting ever tougher, so a major priority for us is seeking funds and managing our finances carefully, to preserve our reserves and ensure a sustainable future.

Finally I'd like to thank Sandra Shaw and her team for their excellent work. I look forward to another exciting year

Liz Sayce
Chair of Trustees

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The positive impact of the Furzedown Project is evident in the confidence, friendships and opportunities that our members gain through being part of the charity.

Our activities provide much more than a place to meet: they create opportunities for people to develop new skills, express themselves, build relationships and feel part of their local community.

One of the highlights of the year was the launch of our first fundraising art and photography exhibition, featuring work created by our members. This was a very proud moment for everyone involved. It provided an opportunity for our members to showcase their creativity and achievements while celebrating their individual talents. The exhibition also demonstrated the importance of providing accessible opportunities for people to express themselves and have their contributions recognised.

We were also delighted to launch our Carers Group, creating a dedicated space where carers can meet others who understand their experiences, share information and support one another. This is an important addition to our work and reflects our commitment to supporting not only our members, but also the people who care for and support them.

Another wonderful example of the commitment within our community was our first weekend away, which was organised with the initiative and dedication of one of our volunteers. The success of the weekend showed what can be achieved when members, volunteers and the charity work together. It was a valuable opportunity for members to enjoy new experiences and strengthen friendships. It demonstrated the extraordinary commitment of our volunteers to making a difference.

None of this would be possible without our volunteers. At a time when charities are facing significant challenges, their contribution has been more important than ever. Volunteers give their time, energy, skills and enthusiasm, and in many ways they are the foundation that keeps the Furzedown Project going. We are immensely grateful to every volunteer who has supported the charity throughout the year.

We would also like to express our sincere thanks to our funders, supporters and the local community. Their belief in the Furzedown Project enables us to continue our work and reach more people. The support we receive is not only financial; it is a reflection of the confidence our community places in what we do and the difference we make.

Like many charities, the Furzedown Project is operating in increasingly challenging times. Costs are rising, funding is under pressure and the demand for our services continues to grow. We are seeing more people who need support and more families and carers looking for opportunities, connection and practical

help. This creates a difficult balance: we want to respond to this growing need, but we can only do so with sufficient and sustainable resources.

The message from this year is therefore both positive and clear: what we do works, our community values what we provide, and the need for our services is greater than ever.

As we look ahead, securing sustainable funding will be essential if we are to build on the progress we have made, welcome new members and continue providing the activities, groups, support and opportunities that have such a positive impact on people's lives. With continued support from funders, our local community, volunteers and partners, I believe the Furzedown Project can continue to grow and make an even greater difference.

I would like to thank our members for their enthusiasm and participation, our volunteers for their extraordinary commitment, the staff team and Board of Trustees for their hard work, and all our funders, donors, partners and community supporters for believing in the Furzedown Project.

Together, we are creating a stronger, more connected and more inclusive community — and I look forward to building on this work in the year ahead.

Sandra Shaw
Director

COORDINATOR'S REPORT

It has been another bumper year of activities, workshops, parties, and outings for the Furzedown Project.

We started the new carers group which is helping so many unpaid carers through talks, advice, and respite with a listening ear from the activities leads. We started the Volunteer Pop Up Cafe which has been well attended and a great way to catch up with everyone in person. The cafes will continue, and we hope to see as many volunteers as possible each month. We said Thank you & farewell to some long-standing dedicated volunteers and welcomed some new faces to the team.

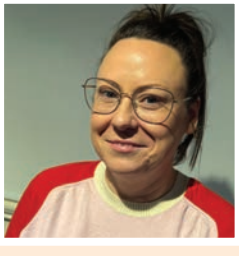
Every volunteer brings something different and together you help make The Furzedown project the welcoming, caring community it is today. Our volunteers are at the heart of everything we do, and we simply couldn't provide the support and companionship our community relies on without them.

From giving their time each week to helping at activities and events, providing transport, offering friendship and companionship, or quietly supporting things behind the scenes, every contribution makes a real difference. It is often the small acts of kindness - a friendly conversation or simply appearing when we are in desperate need of an extra pair of hands.

You are the people who turn up, get stuck in, solve problems, make tea, have a laugh, and somehow manage to make everything look effortless - even when it definitely isn't!

A special shout out to our fundraisers who have helped raise money for new chairs, lighting and hopefully some new awnings in time for next summer. And to the Saturday Film club which continues to thrive thanks to the team.

A massive, heartfelt THANK YOU to ALL of you for your continued support, looking forward to bringing more care and fun to the community next year.



Aimee Leonard
Volunteer coordinator, Furzedown Project.

BEFRIENDING REPORT

Supporting Older People to Stay Socially Connected, Confident and Independent

SERVICE OVERVIEW & IMPACT

Over the past year, our befriending service supported **76 older people**, each facing their own challenges – loneliness, reduced mobility, declining confidence, dementia related issues, anxiety about leaving home, or simply the strain of living alone.

Behind every number is a person. Behind every visit is a moment of relationship.

HOW THE YEAR LOOKED

The outline below illustrates the pattern of referrals and support across the year.

- **Mar-May 2025 (17 members supported)**: A steady flow of new referrals alongside ongoing long-term matches. Volunteer engagement remained steady.
- **Jun-Aug 2025 (20 members)**: Noticeable growth driven by GP and social prescriber referrals, including people living with more complex issues including dementia and mobility challenges.
- **Sep-Nov 2025 (21 members)**: Increased contact from carers seeking respite and emotional support.
- **Dec 2025-Feb 2026 (12 members)**: A seasonal dip in new referrals, but heightened support for existing members. Wellbeing calls and practical help were prioritised.
- **Mar-Apr 2026 (6 members)**: A quieter period that focused on continuity, stabilising support and maintaining long-term matches.

IMPACT ON MEMBERS

Members reported meaningful improvements in their wellbeing:

- Reduced loneliness and isolation
- Improved confidence and independence
- Better emotional wellbeing
- Increased engagement with community activities

These outcomes reflect the importance of consistent social engagement.

VOLUNTEER IMPACT

Volunteers continued to be the heart of the service. They:

- Provided consistent visits & wellbeing calls.
- Supported members with walks, errands and gentle encouragement
- Helped people re-enter community life – attending groups, going for coffee, enjoying time outdoors
- Offered companionship that, for some members, was the only contact they had that day of the week

LOOKING AHEAD: PRIORITIES FOR 2026-27

- **Grow the service** to reach more isolated older people and ensure companionship is available to all who need it.
- **Strengthened volunteer recruitment and training**, including dementia 'friendly' awareness and grief support.
- **Expand wellbeing support**, particularly for members with complex needs.
- **Secure sustainable funding** to meet rising demand and protect continuity of service.

THANK YOU

To our members for their openness. To our volunteers for their dedication - you are the heartbeat of this service. To our partners, funders and trustees - your compassion and commitment make this work possible.

Clive Brown
Outreach Coordinator

THEIR STORY : ER & Ms PW

*"**CB** and the team at The Furzedown Project have been so supportive in helping make my dream of becoming a befriender happen. After the rigorous checks and onboarding process, I was paired with the most incredible lady called **Ms PW**. At 89, she is still a force of nature.*

Ms PW has such a wonderful life story and I absolutely love listening to her memories and experiences. In return, she's always asking about my life antics and so whenever I go to visit her, we always have a giggle together.

I discovered that Ms PW absolutely adores animals. So, I asked a couple of friends with very calm, gentle, therapeutic dogs if I could bring them along to visit her. Seeing the joy that brought Ms PW was incredibly special. Spending an hour together with a furry companion created such a lovely connection and brightened both of our days.

I genuinely look forward to our weekly catchups usually with some chocolate, shortbread, or a few classic biscuits involved! But beyond the tea and treats, befriending has given me a real appreciation for life. Spending time with older, wiser generations reminds you just how quickly life flies by and how important it is to live in the present moment and treasure meaningful human connection.

Sometimes, a volunteer might be the only person someone sees that day or in some cases, that week. That's why I'd encourage anyone considering befriending to give it a go. Don't worry about not having enough time; even a quick phone call, a 30-minute visit, or dropping by for an impromptu catch up can make a huge difference to someone's life.

And who knows…you may end up learning just as much from them as they do from you."

ER, Tooting

This story captures the essence of befriending: shared laughter, companionship, intergenerational connection, and the joy of small moments – from chocolate biscuits to therapeutic dog visits.

ER's reflection highlights how befriending enriches both sides of the relationship. It is not only about reducing loneliness; it is about support and celebrating life stories, building trust and rediscovery joy of social engagement.

IMPACT IN 2026

In May and June 2026, members completed a short survey about the Furzedown Project and the impact that being a member has had on their lives.

In total, 151 people (37% of the 411 members and volunteers) completed the survey.

The survey focused on the overall impact that the Project has had on members' lives and the key, evidence-based areas that are important in promoting wellbeing and protecting against physical and mental ill-health and cognitive decline among older people.

Specifically in relation to the Furzedown Project, these are:

- **Decreasing social isolation and developing strong social connections**
- **Continued learning, trying new things and building new skills.**
- **Being active and moving your body to boost your mood.**
- **Contributing to and engaging with your community**

Read more about these on the following pages...

FURZEDOWN PROJECT
SOCIAL CONNECTION

'I have developed connections or friendships with other people through my involvement in the Furzedown Project.'
96% of survey respondents agree

Members were also asked to rate their level of social connection before joining the Furzedown Project and again after becoming members. The results demonstrate a significant impact in decreasing social isolation and promoting social contact:

- *The proportion of people rating their level of social connection as 'fair' or 'poor' dropped dramatically **from 40% prior to joining the Project to 8% following membership** of the Project.*
- *The proportion of people rating their level of social connection as 'good' or 'excellent' rose substantially **from 59% prior to joining the Project to 91% following membership** of the Project.*

The survey results clearly show that the Furzedown Project has a significant impact on promoting social contact and increasing members' and volunteers' social connection.

WHY SOCIAL CONNECTION IS IMPORTANT

"Social connection is a fundamental human need, as essential to survival as food, water, and shelter." (US Surgeon General, 2023)

"A large body of research shows that social isolation and loneliness have a serious impact on older people's longevity, their physical and mental health, and their quality of life." (World Health Organisation)

Research shows that group activities involving educational or social activity are effective in decreasing social isolation. Volunteering, trusting relationships and frequent contact with friends also help reduce isolation. This is the essence of what the Furzedown Project offers.

ACTIVITIES OFFERED

All of the sessions at the Furzedown Project provide a means of connecting with others. Activities specifically focused on social connection include:

- **Restart Culture and Social Group**
- **Come and Meet Each Other** (CAMEO)
- **Care and Connections Group** (for carers)
- **World Cinema Evening & Film Afternoon**
- **50+ LGBT Coffee Morning**
- **Bridge Club, scrabble & Games**
- **Bingo**

What Our Members Say

Our members' own words show how the Furzedown Project helps people build friendships, feel part of a community and reduce isolation.

"Attending the Furzedown Project has helped me at a time I was very socially isolated – it brought me out of my home."

"Meeting up with people from different walks of life has been really positive. It provides external stimulation which helps to keep the mind and body going."

"Connecting with others heading into older age is wonderful. The LGBT group combines fun, deep sharing, fascinating talks and events – it's unique."

Member's Story

Sanoja rebuilds her confidence and finds a second home after illness

When Sanoja first came to the Furzedown Project in 2018, she was recovering from a stroke and adjusting to a life that had changed dramatically.

Before her illness, she described herself as active, sociable and full of colour. Afterwards, she felt like "a fallen soldier." She arrived at the Project in a wheelchair, unsure of herself and largely silent. ***"When I came here, nobody knew my name,"*** she remembers.

That began to change through the welcome she received. Staff and members learned her name, greeted her and helped her feel part of the group.

Over time, Sanoja started joining in more. She now attends every Monday and Tuesday, taking part in 'Come and Meet Each Other' sessions and other activities. She jokes that she has become "like a nuisance" because she talks so much, but for her, this is a sign of recovery: ***"I feel that I'm reverting back to my normal self."***

The Project has had a profound impact on Sanoja's confidence, independence and wellbeing. She can now move around more easily and is able to cook and garden with the support of an at-home personal care assistant. The Furzedown Project gives her structure, purpose and something to look forward to each week. ***"This is my second home,"*** she says.

Social connection is central to Sanoja's story. Through the Monday and Tuesday groups, she has built friendships with people she would not otherwise have met. She describes the groups as places where people can speak openly, support one another and notice when someone may need help. **If someone is unwell, Sanoja will get in touch with them, and she likes to "feel useful and valued" in this way.**

Trips organised through the Project have also opened up new experiences. Sanoja has enjoyed days out to the seaside, including Brighton and Whitstable, journeys she says she could not have made without the support of the Project and its volunteers. These outings have helped her enjoy "the beauty of the UK" and connect with others beyond her usual groups.

Sanoja's story shows how the Furzedown Project helps to rebuild confidence, reduce isolation and restore a sense of belonging.

From arriving unnamed and withdrawn, she has become a cheerful, confident and active member who supports others - a testament to the warmth, compassion and care at the heart of the Project.

FURZEDOWN PROJECT

CONTRIBUTING

'I contribute to my local community by volunteering at and/or attending the Furzedown Project.'
82% of survey respondents strongly agree or agree

The survey results show that the Furzedown Project has a significant impact by helping members and volunteers feel engaged, valued and able to contribute to their communities in a meaningful way.

WHY CONTRIBUTING IS IMPORTANT

"... there is evidence that participating in valued activity would itself promote well-being. If older adults are able to engage in interesting, useful and stimulating (paid or unpaid) work, everyone could benefit." (Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project 2008)

"There is clearly considerable potential for older adults to be engaged in helping and supporting other older adults - for example, by transferring skills between each other. However, there is also considerable potential for older adults to engage in intergenerational work." (Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Report 2008)

The opportunity to contribute has a positive impact on wellbeing and mental health, but the talents, skills and experiences of older people are often vastly under-recognised and under-

The Furzedown Project gives people opportunities to make valued and valuable contributions to the Project and the wider community.

Members can contribute to groups and activities, while volunteers can take part in a wide range of roles, including home visiting. The Project also creates opportunities for intergenerational work with local schools.

What Our Members and Volunteers Say

Our members and volunteers show how contributing works in practice: people give their time, skills and experience, while also gaining purpose, friendships and a stronger sense of belonging.

"I love the way people from different backgrounds give time and expertise - including many over 80 and over 90 - and they make such a difference to the whole community."

"The Project has introduced me to new people and built on relationships that I had already. It has helped me see how I can contribute to my community and reassured me about services I might need later in life."

"Volunteering is a win-win situation. One feels useful while helping people and enjoying the company of like-minded people. Being a volunteer at the film club is great because you are part of a team, and it's flexible."

"There is an opportunity for everyone to participate in some way - every contribution is helpful and appreciated by all involved."

Volunteer's Stories

Barbara enjoys purpose, connection and community through volunteering

Barbara has been a volunteer at the Furzedown Project since 1997 and is a familiar and welcoming presence at reception on Thursday afternoons.

Barbara's role involves "greeting members, keeping the register, taking payments for sessions and helping with the cash sheet". She also serves tea and biscuits for the bridge club and supports members who may need a little extra help getting to the activity room.

Barbara first became involved at the Project almost three decades ago when she "took the plunge" and began volunteering. She is still giving her time now because of the connection, routine and sense of usefulness it brings. As she explains, *"It's giving something back after my working life, while giving me structure to my week and a sense of purpose."*

Alongside reception, Barbara is a key member of the fundraising team, helping with a variety of events throughout the year. The team now regularly raises over £1,000 at many events – something Barbara is proud of. The funds go towards meaningful improvements for members, such as lighting, upgraded chairs and improved accessibility to toilets.

Barbara is clear about what she gets back from volunteering: "It offers social connection, the chance to do good for others, makes life more interesting and is a way to use my time and energy while I'm still healthy and active."

Ferdous gives back – and grows – through 18 years of volunteering

Ferdous has volunteered with the Furzedown Project for 18 years, leading the 50+ Restart group. In that time, she has created a welcoming space where local older people can stay active, connected and confident.

For Ferdous, volunteering is not simply about giving time – it is about sharing experience, staying purposeful and helping others rediscover confidence in later life. She explains: "This organisation gives people mental and physical confidence. And as you get older, it can restart. That means you start your life again in a different way."

Her words capture the spirit of the 50+ Restart group which combines exercise with time to eat together, talk and share experiences. There are also regular discussions, talks, celebrations and outings. These simple ingredients make a significant difference: members have somewhere to belong, people to meet and activities that keep both body and mind engaged.

Volunteering benefits Ferdous too. It gives her a way to remain active in the community, use her skills and continue learning from others. *"If you know something, you can contribute. I enjoy meeting people, sharing my thinking, and doing things. So I'm teaching and learning."*

For Ferdous, the best part of volunteering is seeing people become stronger, more independent and more willing to take part: "I see how the group helps give them physical and mental strength to cope up with life – this is a great achievement."

Barabara's and Ferdous's stories are a reminder that contributing to the Furzedown Project is not just about giving – it is about growing, connecting and finding renewed purpose at every stage of life.

FURZEDOWN PROJECT
BEING ACTIVE

'I am more physically active since joining the Furzedown Project'
70% of survey respondents strongly agree or agree

The results of our survey clearly demonstrate that the Furzedown Project has a significant impact in enabling people to become more physically active.

Why Physical Activity Is Important

"Regular physical activity is associated with a greater sense of well-being and lower rates of anxiety" (New Economics Foundation)

"Physical fitness contributes to cognitive ability" (Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project)

Research repeatedly shows that physical activity supports both physical and mental health, and contributes to cognitive ability. It is important that people can find an activity they enjoy, and that suits their level of mobility and fitness.

Activities Offered

The Furzedown Project offers a wide range of physical activities tailored to different levels of ability, including:

- **Zumba Gold**
- **Line Dancing**
- **Swimming**
- **Qigong**
- **Walking**
- **Exercise sessions: Chair-based exercise, Standing exercise, Circuit-based exercise**
- **Falls prevention**

What Our Members Say

Members tell us that the Project helps them stay active, feel better and enjoy the company of others.

"The Furzedown Project keeps me moving!"

"I started coming to the Project when I recovered from breast cancer treatment. I did aerobics and yoga and felt so positive."

"I love Qigong and Zumba classes – the energy, exercise and buzz and also the social aspect."

"Zumba is great for fitness, social connections and mental health. It's joyful!"

"Attending the chair-based exercise classes has made a great difference for my upper body."

"The activity has helped me feel a lot more alive now."

Member's Story

Jan rebuilds her health, confidence and social life through the Project

Jan started to regularly attend the Project after struggling with a long-standing hip problem that had restricted her life both physically and socially.

Before her hip replacement, she describes going around with a walking stick and ***"doing nothing and going nowhere."*** The Project gave her a local, welcoming place to rebuild her confidence, meet people and try activities she had never previously considered.

Through the Project, Jan now takes part in Zumba Gold, line dancing and a fitness class focused on balance, stretching and movement. These activities give her a regular, enjoyable way to move more and build activity into her week.

The difference has been significant: ***"Obviously, I'm very much better. I probably would have done some walking, but I certainly wouldn't have been doing much else. I didn't go to any exercise classes."***

The benefits have extended well beyond physical health. Jan has developed friendships through the Project and often goes for a coffee with other members after class. She has also joined organised trips, a favourite being a day at Kew Gardens. These trips have given Jan the chance to meet people from across the Project who share her interests.

For Jan, being active through the Project is closely connected to confidence, wellbeing and feeling part of the community. When asked how the Project supports her, she said: ***"Oh, in every way. You meet people, you talk to people, you find out what's going on locally. Everyone's very warm and friendly, and they make you feel involved. They make you feel part of the Project."***

Jan now describes going to the Furzedown Project as something she genuinely looks forward to – not simply an activity programme. The range of options means people can find something that suits them, whether they want gentle exercise, dance, walking, games or social trips.

Her advice to others is simple: "Obviously, I would say join!"

For Jan, the impact has been lasting and personal:

"This is an important part of my life, and I look forward to it every week. I cannot praise the Furzedown Project enough. They turned my life around in such a lovely way and I would really miss it if it wasn't here."

FURZEDOWN PROJECT

LEARNING

'I learn new things by being involved in the Furzedown Project'

91% of survey respondents strongly agree or agree

With the vast majority of people saying that they had learned new things because of their involvement in the Project, it is clear that it has a significant impact on promoting the learning of its members and volunteers.

Why Learning Is Important

"The evidence shows that learning can help to promote wellbeing and protect against normal cognitive decline with age. And when it takes place in social settings, it can promote wellbeing indirectly through social networking" (Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project)

There is a wealth of evidence that continuing to learn can both promote wellbeing and protect against cognitive decline. Despite this, older people are less likely to participate in learning than younger people, and there is a particularly sharp decline in participation in learning when people retire.

Activities Offered

The Furzedown Project offers a wide range of learning opportunities where members can gain new skills, while also taking part in social activities that help them connect with others. Regular activities include:

- **Digital Inclusion**
- **Photography**
- **Book Club**
- **Knitting and Crochet**
- **Singing**
- **Art**
- **Gardening**

What Our Members Say

Members describe these activities not only as opportunities to learn, but also as ways to build confidence, keep active and feel part of a supportive community.

"I love the art class - it gives me the chance to express my creativity."

"I have learnt a new skill of knitting in a very sociable group."

"I love the feedback we get during the Book Group discussions, truly something that enhances my month."

"I have really enjoyed the craft class and learning how to knit and crochet."

"I have learnt how to use technology and deliver presentations. I have found friends and age mates who share my culture and perspectives. In CAMEO groups I have shared my skills and felt comfortable delivering talks for Windrush and sharing my skills and culture."

Member's Story

Phil discovers new ways to learn and make connections

Phil joined the Furzedown Project around 18 months ago, having known about it for years through his parents. His father had volunteered as a minibus driver, and his mother continues to attend activities including seated exercise, singing and chat groups.

When Phil realised he was old enough to join, he looked at what was on offer and found a programme that felt *"nicely inclusive and diverse"* and, in his words, *"what I needed."*

The Project has helped Phil build confidence in practical, social and emotional ways. One of the most important areas has been digital inclusion. Phil mainly uses his phone rather than a laptop, and the Monday sessions have helped him manage everyday online tasks such as sending attachments, completing forms, using mobile banking and communicating with companies. He explains the value of this support clearly: ***"It makes me feel like I'm not out of the loop. More and more services are moving online, so there's no point in fighting against it, as long as I'm aware of what I'm doing and staying safe."***

Phil regularly attends the carers' support group, which was introduced at the Project this year. He cares for his mother alongside his sister, helping with cleaning, cooking, washing, appointments and other day-to-day needs. The group gives him the chance to share his experience, hear from others in similar situations, and think ahead about what support might be available. As he says, ***"It's kind of preparing me as to what could happen or what potentially will happen."***

The Thursday LGBT group is another highlight. Phil values hearing from people who have lived through different periods of social change. ***"They've all gone before and have got more of a history of change, protest and activism,"*** he says. Personal stories, guest speakers and shared discussion help him understand how laws, communities and experiences have changed over time.

The weekly Saturday Film Club and monthly World Cinema screenings have connected Phil with "like-minded souls." He has a strong interest in film and enjoys being introduced to works from different periods and countries. "We always start with a short talk about the background of the film, its context, its budget and takings, and how it was received," he says giving the sessions both educational and social value.

For Phil, the Furzedown Project has become very important: "It is a part of my life. It is not just something I do," he says.

He is aware that loneliness is never far away: ***"Loneliness is only around the corner, if you don't do anything about it."*** The Project gives him structure, confidence, companionship and many opportunities to keep learning.

Phil's story shows that learning at the Furzedown Project goes far beyond formal classes. It happens through digital support, shared experience, film, conversation and friendship, building independence, reducing isolation and helping people feel connected, valued and part of a community.

DONATING TO THE PROJECT

The Furzedown Project is a charity and donations are key to everything we do. Because every penny counts, your gift, whether large or small, one-off or regular, will make a difference.

When you make a donation or renew your membership please remember to fill out our Gift Aid form if you pay any income tax, as this will allow us to claim an extra 25% from the Inland Revenue on any gift you make, so £20 will be worth £25 to us.

DONATIONS

- A gift of £25 could help support our sociable singing sessions, which are proven to help mental wellbeing
- £60 will help to buy materials for our art and knitting classes which help to enhance social connections and cognitive health for our members.
- A gift of £120 could help to cover fuel costs of the Project minibus for one month

- We'd like to buy an awning to shelter the front entrance of our reception area, to help us cope with the extremes of temperature - with extremly hot summers and bad weather over the winter. **We have a fundraising page on Local Giving - use the QR link below.**

LEGACIES

Please consider leaving a legacy to The Project in your Will, any amount can make a difference and will help us continue to provide activities, support and friendship for many years to come.

You might decide to add a supplement to your existing Will to make an amendment - known as a **codicil** - and we have a codicil form available in our office which will simply need to be filled in and witnessed. Keep your signed codicil in the same safe, secure place as your Will.

If you haven't yet made a Will we can't recommend a particular solicitor, but we suggest you contact the **Law Society** who can provide details of local solicitors.

Free Wills Month takes place in March and October every year and you can get a simple Will written or updated free of charge by a participating solicitor. The focus is on leaving a gift to larger national charities but you are not obliged to and we hope you will consider including The Furzedown Project. Appointments are limited and are allocated on a first-come first-served basis. To find out more visit **freewillsmonth.org.uk**

Become a **'Friend of the Project'** and make a regular donation to The Project!

Set up a Standing Order to make a regular gift: The Furzedown Project's CAF bank details are: Account number: **00081883** Sort code: **40-52-40**

OR visit Local Giving to donate (use this QR code). You can also set up a sponsorship page here if you're planning a challenge, please let us know!

EVENTS & SPONSORED CHALLENGES

A big **THANK YOU** to all our fundraisers, including The Senior Street Sextet who raised £986 at their Jazz night, Praz, who ran Vitality half marathon raising £1,190, Furzedown FACE's Quiz night and Garden Gig and everyone who voted for us at Waitrose in Balham, which raised £1000!

And everyone who supports and contributes to our stalls, sales and raffles!

Treasurer's report

During the year 2025-2026 the financial position and performance of the Furzedown Project (the project) has been satisfactory with a small deficit of £16,989, largely due to expenditure on the minibus using money raised last year.

As mentioned last year the surplus for 2024-2025 included the money raised for the minibus purchase and maintenance (which was purchased in April 2025). Excluding this from the total surplus for the year the project had a surplus of £41,835 for the year ending 31st March 2025. There were £15,068 of minibus related expenses during 2025-2026 that have been paid from the funds raised last year (opening balance for the minibus fund was £78,375).

Excluding the minibus expenses the deficit in the year was £1,921. The 2025-2026 deficit is also driven by the expenditure of the Outreach programme which is funded by a Grant until 2027, however it does require support from the general reserves. There was a deficit totalling £32,719 in the restricted funds which has been mitigated by the surplus in the general reserves which represents the fundraising, donations and fees that have been raised through the hard work of members and volunteers. These have more than covered the remaining expenses for running the project in the year 2025-2026.

The project has a strong cash balance of £194,735.

2025-2026 has shown the difficulty in securing Grants, particularly the funding of the Outreach programme. This is an area that the board is focusing on and a campaign is being devised to raise funds for the Outreach programme.

The total reserves for the project were £240,406, however £95,364 of this total is in relation to projects that will be completed in the coming years. The unrestricted reserves that can be utilised when there are times of uncertainty total £131,925 (excluding the redundancy fund). The reserves policy requires 6 months operating costs to be retained. This highlights the requirement for the project to consider alternative funding options, so that we can spread the risk of a single income stream collapsing.

Thank you to the members and volunteers for the conscientious efforts in keeping the energy high when fundraising and providing the project's activities. We will be relying on you to keep this energy up in the year to come so that we can keep providing these fantastic programmes and support.

Prasantha Sugunasingha,
Treasurer, Furzedown Project

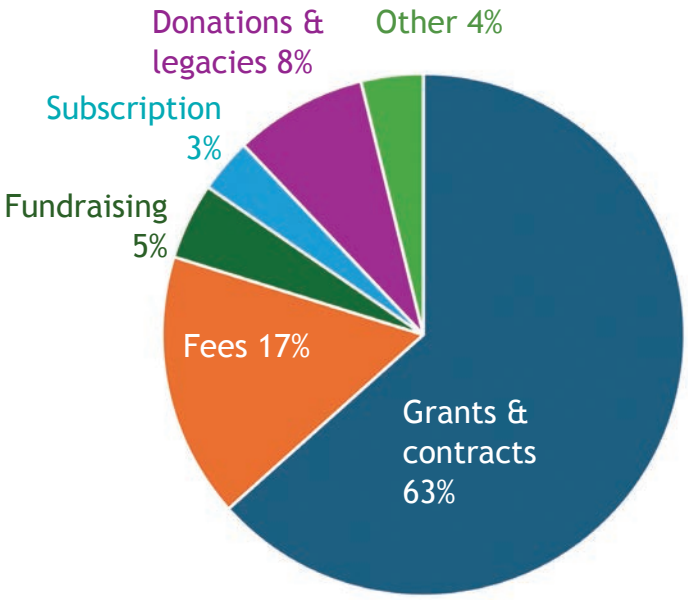
FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS

The Trustees' Report and Accounts prepared in accordance with SORP 2005 as required by the Charities Commission are available separately.

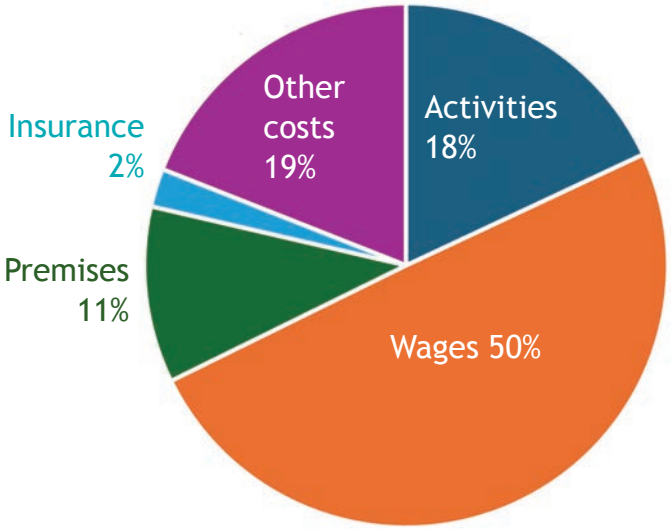
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES 12 months ended 31 March 2026

	Unrestricted Activities	Restricted Activities	TOTAL
INCOME (£)			
Grants & Contracts	-	£128,772	**£128,772**
Activities Fees	£16,761	£17,191	**£33,952**
Membership Subs	£6,844	-	**£6,844**
Fund Raising	£9,626	-	**£9,626**
Rent	£3,390	-	**£3,390**
Donations	£16,698	-	**£16,698**
Legacies	£0	-	**-**
Sundry Income	£275	-	**£275**
Bank Interest	£3,583	-	**£3,583**
TOTAL INCOME	**£57,177**	**£145,963**	**£203,140**
OUTGOINGS			
Salaries NI and Pension	£155	£109,249	**£109,404**
Activities	£9,329	£30,365	**£39,694**
Transport	-	£882	**£882**
Rent & Rates	-	£15,182	**£15,182**
Premises Costs	-	£8,773	**£8,773**
Insurance	£2,710	£2,500	**£5,210**
Office Costs	£26,911	£11,730	**£38,641**
Audit	£2,050	-	**£2,050**
Bank Charges	£293	-	**£293**
TOTAL EXPENSE	**£41,448**	**£178,681**	**£220,129**
Surplus/(Deficit) for year	£15,729	-£32,718	**-£16,989**
Total Funds b/f	£129,313	£128,082	**£257,395**
Total Funds c/f	£145,042	£95,364	**£240,406**

INCOME



EXPENDITURE



BALANCE SHEET 12 months ended 31 March 2026

		31 March 2026	31 March 2025
FIXED ASSETS			
Tangible Assets	-	**£61,875**	*£8,209*
CURRENT ASSETS			
Debtors	£4,511	-	*£33,613*
Cash at bank and in hand	£194,735	-	*£235,895*
	£199,246	-	***£269,508***
LIABILITIES:			
Deferred Income	-£(7,292)	-	*-£(9,900)*
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	-£(13,423)	-	*-£(10,422)*
	-£(20,715		***-(£20,322)***
NET CURRENT ASSETS	-	**£178,531**	***£249,186***
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES	-	**£240,406**	***£257,395***
TOTAL NET ASSETS	-	**£240,406**	***£257,395***
FUNDS			
Restricted income funds	-	£95,364	*£128,082*
Designated Funds	-	£13,117	*£13,117*
Unrestricted income funds	-	£131,925	*£116,196*
Total Reserves	-	**£240,406**	***£257,395***

The Furzedown Project

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Thank you to everyone who has supported us and special thanks go to the following organisations who have awarded grants and made donations