



# Hypertension Health Awareness Event for people with a Learning Disability

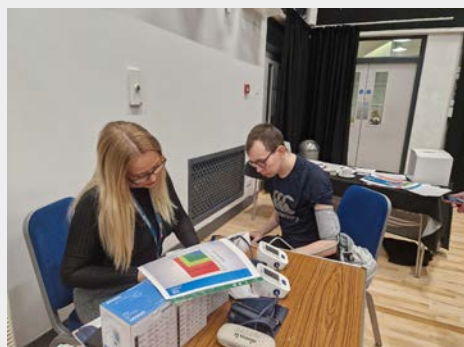
12 February 2025

**NHS**

Bedfordshire, Luton  
and Milton Keynes  
Integrated Care Board

**healthwatch**  
Central Bedfordshire

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# Event at a glance

**67 people attended the event plus Healthwatch staff and volunteers**



**Dynamic Hypertension Awareness Keynote**



**11 organisations attended and exhibited at the event**



**Inspiring Real-Life Insights**



**28 attendee evaluation forms completed**



**Vibrant Entertainment and Community Engagement**





# Introduction

Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care System (BLMK ICS) commissioned The Denny Review; 'A rapid evidence review of the health inequalities experienced by the local communities of Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes' in April 2022. It aimed to improve its understanding of health inequalities in its local communities and good practice to address them. It identified priorities for areas of focus for engagement and co-production with individuals and communities to agree actions to reduce inequalities.

The Denny Review demonstrated that the wider determinants of health, including socioeconomic deprivation, psychological, cultural and individual factors affect health and wellbeing. All these factors intersect and have a cumulative effect on an individual, family, social group or community. The review evidenced that the communities affected by the health inequalities in BLMK include, but are not limited to, ethnic minority groups, Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities, people living in deprived neighbourhoods, people with disability, and people experiencing homelessness, migrants, and LGBTQ+. These groups experience health inequalities from unfair distribution and the impact of wider determinants of health to access health care services.

The ICS aims to understand the nature, causes and potential solutions to inequalities in health through a whole-system approach to understand, inform and tackle health inequalities affecting BLMK local communities. A full report of all the activities undertaken as part of this review can be found here:

[https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-Denny-Report\\_23.09.11\\_13.45\\_ac.pdf](https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-Denny-Report_23.09.11_13.45_ac.pdf)

As part of the Denny Review project, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (HWCB) successfully facilitated, managed, and hosted two impactful health education events for the residents of Central Bedfordshire. The first event, a dedicated **Men's Health initiative**, took place on 12th September 2024 at the Grove Integrated Care Hub in Dunstable.

In collaboration with a Health and Wellbeing Coach from Chiltern Hills PCN, the event was meticulously planned and delivered to empower men of all ages with practical insights and preventive strategies for better health. Participants engaged in dynamic discussions and interactive sessions, which led to increased awareness of key health issues and actionable steps for improving personal wellbeing. This initiative not only enhanced individual health literacy but also fostered a sense of community and ongoing commitment to men's health. For a comprehensive overview, including participant feedback and measurable outcomes, please refer to the full report here: <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/mens-health-awareness-event-report>

On 12th February 2025, HWCB hosted its second health education event, '**Reducing Hypertension (High Blood Pressure) – a Health Awareness Event for People with Learning Disabilities**', at the Rufus Centre in Flitwick. This event was strategically designed to offer accessible, tailored information about hypertension to residents with learning disabilities, along with their families and carers.



The program featured expert presentations, interactive discussions, entertainment and practical demonstrations that empowered attendees to understand the causes, risk factors, and management strategies associated with high blood pressure.

Hypertension management is a top priority for BLMK ICB (Integrated Care Board), given that around 47,000 individuals in the area currently have uncontrolled hypertension, a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease (CVD), heart failure, and stroke. By enhancing diagnostic procedures and treatment options, BLMK ICB aims to prevent an estimated 160 heart attacks and 240 strokes over the next three years. For patients with existing CVD (secondary CVD), the ICB is targeting a 35% success rate in reaching treatment goals through a combination of drug therapy and tailored counselling for high-risk individuals. These strategic initiatives highlight the commitment of BLMK ICB to reducing the overall burden of CVD and improving patient outcomes in the region (<sup>1</sup>*generatedhealth*).

Research indicates that individuals with learning disabilities face a 24% higher risk of early-onset cardiovascular disease (CVD), including heart failure and strokes. They also exhibit increased rates of obesity, diabetes, and high blood sugar—likely due

to a sedentary lifestyle, limited awareness of risk factors, social exclusion, lower income, and reduced access to leisure and healthcare services. These findings underscore the importance of routine CVD screening through annual health checks, alongside early intervention strategies and effective primary care support to promote healthier lifestyles (<sup>2</sup> *Learning disability today, 2025*).

Individuals with learning disabilities should be proactively invited by their GP practices to undergo an annual health check starting at age 14. These annual health checks serve as a comprehensive “health MOT” by including essential assessments such as blood pressure measurements. Following the check, clinicians develop a tailored health action plan for each patient, which is crucial for early detection and management of conditions like hypertension.

Recognising the importance of early intervention, HWCB’s Hypertension Event was designed to empower individuals with learning disabilities by enhancing their understanding of hypertension. The event provided clear, accessible information on what hypertension is, effective prevention strategies, its potential health impacts, and how to manage the condition. The ELFT Health Equalities team contributed a detailed PowerPoint presentation and an engaging video that explained the benefits of annual health checks.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://generatedhealth.com/blmk-icb-improving-population-hypertension-management-using-florence>

<sup>2</sup> People with learning disabilities at increased risk of heart disease



This initiative not only raised awareness but also equipped attendees with practical knowledge to take charge of their health, ultimately aiming to reduce the risk of hypertension-related complications in this vulnerable population.

An interview was conducted with a Central Bedfordshire resident with Down's Syndrome, offering firsthand insights into her experience with the Annual Health Check (AHC) at her GP practice. Her account highlighted both the benefits and areas for improvement in the AHC process, providing valuable, lived-experience perspectives.

Although BeActive, an organisation dedicated to promoting physical activity, was originally scheduled to present, they were unable to

attend. To ensure continuity, a HWCB staff member delivered their presentation on their behalf, maintaining the event's educational agenda.

The event also featured a range of information stands, with representatives from the Disability Resource Centre, BLMK ICB (promoting Pharmacy First and the NHS App), Ategi, Central Bedfordshire Council, and the Macintyre Bedfordshire Down's Syndrome Support Group. (A full list of participating organisations and stall holders is available on page 8.) Additionally, the ELFT Health Equalities team and HWCB staff offered visitors the opportunity to have their blood pressure measurements taken, further enhancing the practical benefits of the day.





# Methodology

HWCB began planning the event in November 2024 by directly inviting local organisations to either present, exhibit, or attend. The chosen venue, the Rufus Centre in Flitwick, was selected for its capacity to accommodate larger groups, central location, and excellent accessibility and parking facilities.

Event details were widely publicised across Bedfordshire through multiple channels. Social media platforms, including Facebook, X (Twitter), LinkedIn, and Instagram, were utilised alongside targeted posters distributed to key stakeholders. Advertisements appeared in Town and Parish Council Newsletters, community magazines (such as The Oracle and Ampthill and Flitwick publications), and on the Dunstable Town Council "What's On" TV screen, as well as notice boards at Flitwick Library, Flitwick Leisure Centre, and Tesco in Flitwick ensuring high local visibility.

Invited speakers, exhibitors, and partner organisations received promotional posters in advance to share within their networks.

HWCB also distributed a prepared text message to all GP Practice Managers via email for sharing with their patients through AccuRX. The event was further promoted through the HWCB weekly E Bulletins, community event listings, and targeted emails sent to the entire HWCB distribution list.

Additionally, direct emails were sent to the Central Bedfordshire Council Engagement Team, Adult Social Care, and Learning Disability Day Centres across Central Bedfordshire (including Silsoe and Biggleswade), as well as to the BLMK ICB Communication and Engagement Team.

HWCB also participated in the SEND Roadshow at the Weatherley Centre in Biggleswade in February 2025, where information and posters about the learning disability event were distributed. In the weeks leading up to the event, regular updates were provided on the HWCB website, ensuring comprehensive outreach and engagement.



**NHS**  
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and Milton Keynes  
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**healthwatch**  
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## Reducing Hypertension (High Blood Pressure) A health awareness event for people with learning disabilities

**Wednesday 12th February**  
**10.00am-12pm**  
**Refreshments from 9.30am**

**The Rufus Centre**  
**Steppingley Road**  
**Flitwick MK45 1AH**

This event is to raise awareness of the health benefits of reducing hypertension in people with learning disabilities. Parents/Carers are welcome.



Speakers



Stands



BP checks



Refreshments



Entertainment

To book your free place, please scan the QR code, email [annette.brown@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk](mailto:annette.brown@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk) or call 0300 303 8554





# Summary

The event featured three dynamic speakers, delivering two presentations and one interview, and hosted eleven exhibitors, all of whom received promotional posters in advance to extend the event's reach through their networks.

Although BeActive, originally scheduled to present on the benefits of staying active for better health, was unable to attend, HWCB ensured continuity by delivering the presentation on their behalf.

Entertainment was provided by a local music band from 'Living It Up', a charity that supports people with learning disabilities, adding a vibrant, community focused element to the day. Additional contributions came from Youth Inspired, a local support group for people with learning disabilities.

The event attracted over **67** attendees from areas across Central Bedfordshire and Bedford. Upon arrival, visitors were given a printed programme outlining the speakers' itinerary and details of the participating information stands.

Feedback was actively sought from all attendees and exhibitors. Ten individuals with learning disabilities completed easy-read evaluation forms designed by HWCB and the ELFT Health Equalities team, while 18 separate forms were submitted by other visitors and stall holders.

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with **70%** of participants with learning disabilities rating the event as '**good**' and **94%** of all visitors rating it as '**very good**'. This strong response underscores the event's impact in effectively engaging the community and delivering valuable health education.

The CEO of HWCB opened the event by warmly welcoming all attendees, introducing the keynote speakers, and providing an overview of the available information stands.

A total of **11 exhibitors** (including HWCB and Young Healthwatch stands) attended the event, which included:

- ◆ BLMK ICB - Pharmacy First and NHS App
- ◆ Macintyre
- ◆ Ategi
- ◆ Central Bedfordshire Council - Senior Practitioner Nurse (Adult service - Community Assessment Services)
- ◆ Bedfordshire Down's Syndrome Support Group
- ◆ Carers in Bedfordshire
- ◆ East London Foundation Trust Bedfordshire Recovery college (ELFT)- Health Equalities team
- ◆ Disability Resource Centre
- ◆ Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (plus Young Healthwatch)
- ◆ Living It Up



# Presentations

## East London Foundation Trust (ELFT) – Health Equalities Team

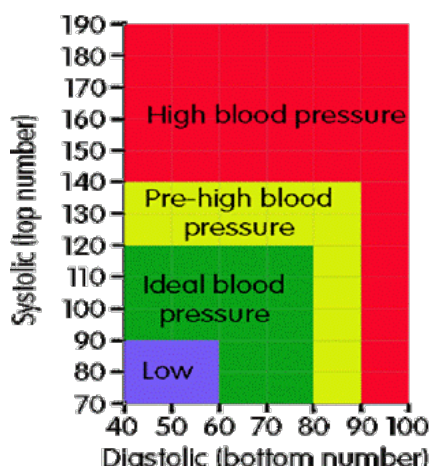
The Health Equalities team, part of the Bedfordshire services for people with learning disabilities managed by ELFT, delivered a compelling presentation titled *'High Blood Pressure – What is it?'*

The Clinical Nurse Manager used a clear balloon analogy to explain how the heart functions and how blood pressure builds: a balloon remains soft when partially filled, but as more air is added and its expansion is restricted, pressure increases. This analogy effectively illustrated how sustained high blood pressure forces the heart to work harder, potentially leading to heart attacks and strokes.



Key preventative strategies were outlined, including maintaining a balanced diet, managing weight, reducing alcohol intake, quitting smoking, engaging in regular physical activity, and adhering to prescribed medication. The session also provided practical guidance on blood pressure measurements, defining normal, at-risk, high, and low ranges, and featured a video demonstration of an Annual Health Check (AHC) to reinforce these concepts.

Diagram provided by ELFT:



A detailed diagram displaying the ELFT Health Equalities Team's contact names, telephone numbers, and service areas across Bedfordshire was presented (see link below), and attendees were then invited to ask questions.

<https://www.elft.nhs.uk/services/specialist-services-people-learning-disability-bedfordshire-and-luton>

One attendee asked how long it typically takes for blood pressure to lower once management begins; ELFT explained that this varies depending on an individual's overall health and any additional conditions. Another attendee inquired about mobile apps for checking blood pressure, but ELFT did not have specific information on those at the time.

## Interview with Kim Petty

Kim, an inspirational 36-year-old woman with Down's Syndrome, lives in Central Bedfordshire with her mother, Heather. Despite the personal challenges involved, Kim courageously agreed to share her experience of having an Annual Health Check (AHC) at her GP surgery during an interview at the event.

Recognising the significance of her contribution, HWCB arranged an online meeting beforehand with Kim and her mother to provide guidance and a set of questions, ensuring she felt well-prepared and supported.

At the event, Kim confidently introduced herself, sharing details about her life, her home, and her family. She also highlighted her community involvement as a volunteer for a Salvation Army store and her achievement of a Level 1 qualification in Health and Social Care.

Her willingness to speak openly about her experiences not only demonstrates remarkable personal courage but also serves as a powerful inspiration for others in the community, reinforcing the importance of advocating for one's health.



When asked about an invitation to attend her AHC, Kim confirmed she went, saying:

*"I've had lots of experience with them and they are an important part of keeping track of my health."*

When asked how her GP practice contacts her about her AHC, she said,

*"they contact me by posting a letter to confirm my appointment date and time to book straight away to put in my diary, so I'm already organised and prepped. That way everything is organised for me."*

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When asked who she had the AHC with, Kim answered,

*"I have my health checks with a specialist doctor who is assigned to me. This doctor also takes care of my disability reviews, so I see him regularly. Once a year for these check ups."*

When asked about her experience of having her AHC, Kim explained,

*"I have to admit it's a bit nerve wracking for me. The whole experience can feel quite daunting to be honest. One of the things that makes it harder is that the doctor often doesn't explain why they're doing these certain things. For example, when they check my chest and heart, I don't always understand the reasons for these procedures and that lack of clarity can make the whole process a bit more stressful."*

Kim was asked how her health check experience could be improved, and she emphasised that clearer communication from her doctor would make a significant difference. She explained that if her doctor took a moment to explain the purpose behind each test and procedure, it would help her feel much more at ease and better informed, adding,

*"It would make the whole experience smoother and helpful for me to understand what's going on without feeling confused or anxious."*

When asked if she thought it was important to have a health check and why, Kim said,

*"absolutely, I do believe health checks are very important. You never know if something is going on with your health that needs to be addressed. It's always better to catch these things early, so if there are any changes in your health, you can deal with them sooner rather than later."*

When asked if she would encourage other people to go for their annual health checks, Kim said,

*"Yes, I would highly recommend it, especially for those people with disabilities or any health concerns, having an annual health check is so worthwhile. It helps you stay on top of your health and ensures that any issues are spotted early, which is always a good thing."*

A member of the audience asked Kim how she felt after having her annual health check, to which she replied,

*"I feel good and I'm glad that I've had it."*



Kim's passion for life is evident in her impressive achievements. Embracing her identity with Down's Syndrome, she has launched an innovative website dedicated to raising awareness about living with a disability. Through her courageous campaign to break down barriers, Kim is actively challenging stereotypes and championing the idea of 'ability within disability'. Her work not only empowers others in the community but also highlights the unique strengths and potential that individuals with disabilities bring to society. The link to her website is <https://kimborocks.com/>.

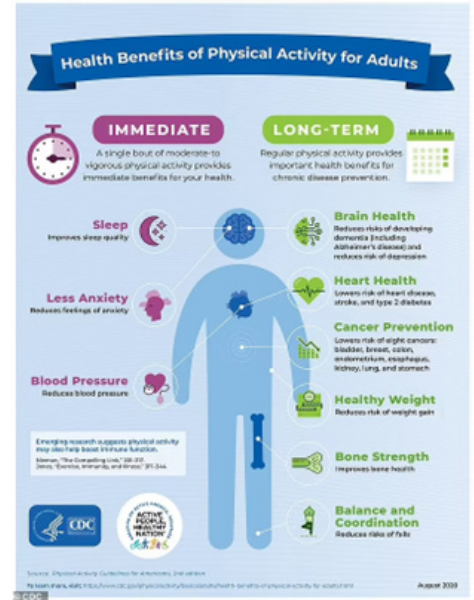
Kim can also be followed on TikTok@kimborockes and Instagram kimborockster.

## BeActive – ‘The Benefits of Exercise on Hypertension’

Be Active is Bedfordshire’s Active Partnership with a mission to address inequalities in access to physical activity across Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, and Luton. They collaborate with community organisations, governing bodies, coaches, clubs, and volunteers to support, develop, and promote physical activity.

Although the originally scheduled presenters were unable to attend, they provided a comprehensive presentation to HWCB that was delivered by a dedicated staff member. The presentation highlighted the significant benefits of increased physical activity, noting that regular movement can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease by up to 35% and lower the likelihood of developing colon cancer, diabetes, depression, and fractures from falls.

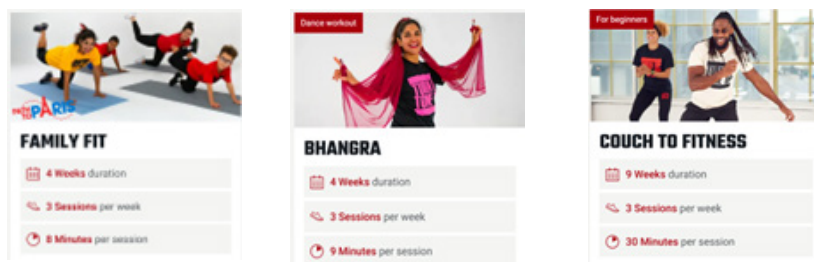
Using a detailed diagram, the presentation clearly illustrated both the immediate and long-term effects of exercise. Immediate benefits include improved sleep quality, reduced anxiety, and lower blood pressure, while long-term advantages encompass enhanced brain and heart health, a decreased risk of cancer, effective weight management, and increased cognitive strength.



Recommended levels of exercise were explained for moderate and vigorous intensity activities. At least 150 minutes (2.5 hours) of moderate intensity activity or 75 minutes (1.25 hours) of vigorous intensity activity are recommended with strengthening exercises for muscle, bone and joint health recommended for at least 2 days per week. Sedentary time e.g., whilst watching TV and sitting at a desk, should be reduced and for older people, activities such as Tai Chi and bowls can improve balance.

The following posters were supplied by BeActive via their presentation:

Free online resources, endorsed by sport England and the NHS, were also provided.



A poster displaying website information and a QR code was showcased to promote ‘**We Are Undefeatable**’, a clinically backed campaign designed to empower individuals with long-term conditions. The initiative offers tailored workouts, practical tips, and inspirational films to help people engage in physical activity in a way that suits their unique needs.

# Feedback

## Learning Disability Visitors Feedback

Feedback from the 10 easy-read evaluation forms completed by visitors with learning disabilities demonstrated a strong, positive impact:

- ◆ **Overall Satisfaction: 70%** rated the event as **'good'**.
- ◆ **Highlights:** Half of the respondents found the speakers most useful, while the other half valued the information stands.
- ◆ **Areas for Improvement:** Only **10%** felt the **speakers could improve**, and **30%** noted issues with the **information stands**; the majority had no concerns.
- ◆ **Engagement:** Every respondent confirmed they had the opportunity to ask a speaker a question.
- ◆ **Access to Information: 60%** felt they had ample time to visit the information tables, with only **20%** indicating otherwise.
- ◆ **Amenities:** All respondents praised the quality of the food.

Overall, the event was very well received by attendees and exhibitors, underscoring its success in engaging and informing the community.

## Demographics

Of the visitors that attended the event and completed the easy-read evaluation forms, demographic information was captured as follows:

- ◆ **Gender:** five men, two women, one girl and one boy and one who did not respond.
- ◆ **Age:** Two people between 18-24 years, Six people between 25-49, one person between 65-79 and one person did not respond.
- ◆ **Location:** Four people from Bedford, two from Kempston, one from Ampthill, one from Shefford, one from Silsoe and one from Marston Moretaine.



## Exhibitors & Visitors Feedback

Exhibitors and visitors provided overwhelmingly positive feedback on the event. Among the 18 evaluation forms received:

- ◆ **Overall Satisfaction:** 94% of respondents were **very satisfied** with the event, while 6% reported being **satisfied**.
- ◆ **Presentations:** 77% of organisations were **very satisfied** with the presentations, and an additional 17% were **satisfied**. Notably, 44% of respondents identified the **ELFT** presentation as the **most useful element**.
- ◆ **Information Stands:** 77% of visitors were **very satisfied** with the information provided at the stands.
- ◆ **Venue:** 88% of participants expressed **high satisfaction** with the venue.

These results highlight the event's success in engaging participants and delivering valuable content, ensuring a positive experience across all key aspects.

Additional comments from stall holders included the following:

*'Loved the size of the event, small enough to network well.'*

*'Will definitely recommend my daughter's home/care staff attend future events.'*

*'Staff were very helpful. The inclusion was fantastic, and the group were a very good addition. Good networking opportunities.'*

*'Please do an annual LD event.'*

*'Loved the band.'*

*'Please can we have some more of those events.'*

*'It was a great informative experience that I hope happens more often.'*

*'It would be nice to see it as a regular feature covering other issues.'*

*'Very good event created well to the audience.'*

*'Interesting event, informative. Nice range of topics and entertainment from the band - great!'*

*'Well planned, good venue, good speakers, great lunch!'*

**Lorraine Koryczan:**  
*'This was such a good event,  
please do them more often.'*

**HUC, the NHS111 Provider, commented  
and posted on Facebook as follows:**  
*'This was a great event, thank  
you Healthwatch for hosting. Very  
informative and great opportunity to  
network with other organisations.'*



## Demographics – Exhibitors & Visitors

Of the visitors and exhibitors that attended the event and completed the feedback, demographic information was captured as follows:

- ◆ **Gender:** three men, 14 women and one person did not respond.
- ◆ **Age:** Seven people between 25-49, six people between 50-64 and 4 people aged between 65-79 years, one person did not respond.

Many organisations advertised the event through their networks and closed groups on Facebook, internal communications and on social media.

# Conclusion

HWCB was delighted to facilitate and host the Learning Disability Hypertension Health Awareness event for people with Learning Disabilities including their Carers and family members in partnership with key stakeholders. The overwhelmingly positive feedback underscored the event's success and the community's desire for more initiatives like this.

## Key outcomes included:

- ◆ **Community Demand:** Attendees consistently expressed the need for additional learning disability focused health events.
- ◆ **Enhanced Collaboration:** The ELFT Health Equalities Team was impressed by the event's impact, leading to an invitation for Kim Petty to share her AHC experience at an upcoming GP training session. This has strengthened ties with the Bedfordshire Down's Syndrome Support Group, which has since been added to the HWCB website and featured in the February 2025 e-bulletin.
- ◆ **Immediate Health Impact:** A carer present at the event had her blood pressure measured by an ELFT nurse, revealing very high levels. This critical intervention prompted her to seek further medical care, and she is now receiving treatment to manage her condition.

The event's clear impact was evident in the positive feedback received from participants. Attendees reported a significant increase in their understanding of hypertension, expressed greater confidence in managing their own health, and showed an enthusiasm for adopting healthier lifestyle choices. The interactive format encouraged active engagement, enabling participants to ask questions, share personal experiences, and connect with local health services. Consequently, the event not only enhanced individual health literacy but also strengthened community ties by fostering a supportive network among attendees, carers, and health professionals.

In summary, the event not only provided valuable health information and community engagement but also delivered tangible health outcomes, highlighting the importance and effectiveness of targeted, accessible health education initiatives.





# Thank You

We would like to extend a huge thank you to all the presenters, speakers, and 'Livingitup', who provide social and educational opportunities for adults with learning disabilities and autism in and around Bedfordshire, and all attendees on the day.

Many thanks also to HWCB volunteers who provided invaluable support before, during and after the event.



## Join Our Team as a Volunteer and Make a Difference!

Are you passionate about giving back to your community? We're looking for enthusiastic volunteers from all backgrounds to help improve health and social care services in Central Bedfordshire. As part of our dedicated and ambitious team, you'll have the opportunity to make a real impact, ensuring local voices are heard and services continue to improve. Get involved today and be the change!

**No two days are the same when volunteering with us!**

Whether you're:



Engaging with people at community events to gather their health experiences



Or visiting hospitals, GP surgeries, and care homes as an Authorised Representative

**There's always something exciting to be part of, and your contribution can make a big difference.**

If you live in Central Bedfordshire and would like to explore how you can get involved, or just have an informal chat about the opportunities available, contact us:



[info@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk](mailto:info@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk)  
or call **0300 303 8554**

**We would love to hear from you!**



# About Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is the local consumer champion promoting choice and influencing the provision of high quality health, social care and wellbeing services for all across Central Bedfordshire.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (HWCB) has significant statutory powers to ensure that the voice of the consumer is strengthened and heard by those who commission, deliver and regulate health and care services. HWCB engages and consults with all sections of the local population so that a wide cross-section of views are heard, understood and acted upon. Everything we say and do is informed by our connections to local people and our expertise is grounded in their experience.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is one of three local Healthwatch in the County of Bedfordshire and belong to a network of local Healthwatch. Healthwatch England leads, supports and guides the Healthwatch network which is made up of the national body and local Healthwatch across each of the 152 local authority areas in England.

Healthwatch is the only body looking solely at people's experience across all health and social care. As a statutory watchdog our role is to ensure that local health and social care services, and the local decision-makers put the experiences of people at the heart of their care.

**healthwatch**  
Central Bedfordshire

# healthwatch

Central Bedfordshire

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire [www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk](http://www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk)

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Registered Charity No: 1154627



Healthwatch **Central Bedfordshire**