



Annual Impact Report

2023/2024



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHAIR'S REPORT

Aurora Nexus strives to be the support organisation of choice for those with Autism and learning disabilities: the people you trust to care for your loved ones in the same way you would yourself. As for all charitable organisations in the Care Sector, the past year has been challenging and we continue to seek new and innovative ways to meet these challenges.

We now support 144 people in 26 supported living, registered care, day services and outreach. We offer day services in Lewisham and Bromley to those who need them and we continue to work on our own income-generating services such as assisting the people we support in making greetings cards.

Over the past two years we have risen to the challenge of transitioning Aurora Options and Lewisham Nexus into Aurora Nexus. With Gill Bryant joining us from Aspens as our CEO, we look forward to further developing and expanding our services to individuals and to our local communities, working in partnership with the families of those we support: 'Friends of Aurora Nexus'. Gill has already made great inroads to consolidate Aurora Nexus, ensuring that our teams reflect the infrastructure needed to take us forward from this point.

Our success could not be achieved and continued without reliable and caring teams at the heart of the organisation with positive leadership from the Executive Team and a hand on the tiller from the Board of Trustees.

I look forward to working with Gill, the Executive Team and the Board of Trustees over the next year to take Aurora Nexus forward to the next milestone and continuing to provide the excellent services within the Social Care Sector.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CEO REPORT

Aurora Nexus entered 2023 facing significant challenges affecting the health and social care sector, including a cost-of-living crisis, rising fuel costs, recruitment shortages, and budget cuts from local authorities. Additionally, post-merger integration efforts were underway, unifying policies, processes, and approaches. In July 2023, CEO Andrea Wiggins left, and an interim CEO was appointed until January 2024.

I was honoured to join Aurora Nexus as CEO in January 2024, committed to guiding the charity into its next phase. My first three months focused on finance, structure, and culture. We achieved cost savings through spending adjustments, restructured the executive team, and addressed workplace culture through a January staff survey. We've set unified behavioural standards and strengthened central services, including new roles in HR and Marketing and Communications support, helping us tell our story and promoting the work we do. This will be essential going forward to support the charity's growth.

The on-going commitment and dedication from our team has meant that the numbers of staff leaving Aurora Nexus remains low, providing the people we support with consistency and stability. We still have vacancies to fill, but our new HR team are busy addressing this.

For 2024/25, we aim to solidify our policies, foster a positive culture, and refresh our mission, vision, and strategy to position ourselves for growth in 2025 and beyond. I look forward to the journey ahead.



MISSION AND VISION

OUR VISION

A world where people with learning disabilities or Autism are equal in society and lead a good life.

OUR MISSION

To deliver services that support individuals with learning disabilities or autism to live fulfilling lives, effectively engaged in their local community feeling safe and involved.

OUR VALUES

Our Values are core ethics or principles that we will abide to, no matter what. They will inspire our best efforts and constrain actions. Over time they will improve our ethical character.

We are proactive, honest, professional and brave!

PROACTIVE AND INNOVATIVE IN EVERYTHING WE DO

HONEST

We will acknowledge our errors and mistakes and foster an open and transparent culture, to learn from them and improve our future performance.

PROFESSIONAL WE WILL STRIVE TO BE PROFESSIONAL IN EVERYTHING WE DO

BRAVE

We will support people to be brave and to take risks, we will be courageous in everything we do and we will do the right thing even when it isn't the easy thing.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

MILESTONES



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

ABOVE AND BEYOND AWARDS

We have discussed new ways of recognising staff who go an extra mile and we plan to introduce two Above and Beyond award programs to recognise exceptional efforts across Aurora Nexus in 2024/25. Each month, staff will be able to nominate an individual who has gone the extra mile, with winners receiving a voucher. Additionally, teams that excel together may be nominated every quarter. Winning teams will not only be celebrated but also entered into a year-end draw for a team night out. This initiative will aim to foster a culture of appreciation and recognition across the organisation.





KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

INNOVATIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS

BRIGHT HR

We implemented and rolled out BrightHR to the organisation. We had previously been using the parent company, Croner Simplify, an online HR recording system. The whole of the records system was copied over with assistance from Croner and Aurora Nexus HR Team, with the project being completed in October 2023. The new system allows for Managers to view their staff information far easier and update annual leave and sickness for their teams more efficiently than before. We also plan to implement the BrightHR app to all staff in the near future. This will mean staff can book their annual leave and get it signed off straightaway electronically by their manager. This will save management time and issues with the length of time that it can take to be agreed.

NOURISH

We've launched a digital care recording platform called Nourish, giving staff instant access to support plans and risk assessments via an app on a phone or tablet. Nourish streamlines daily tasks—staff can update notes, complete assessments, manage health records, log A&Is, and capture photos all in one place. Managers also benefit from real-time updates, accessible from anywhere, ensuring seamless oversight and support delivery.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

NEW SUPPORTED LIVING SERVICE

We partnered with a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) to transform a 5-bedroom house in Lewisham into a supported living service for young adults aged 18-24 with learning disabilities and autism. This service was created to support individuals transitioning from out of borough placements, residential colleges, foster care, or family homes, helping them live more independently. The aim of the service is to empower young people to live independently within a supported environment, giving them the confidence and skills to thrive in the community.

A manager and support staff were recruited. Staff received tailored training particularly around Makaton, Positive Behaviour Support and Skills Teaching.

We provided 1 to 1 outreach support prior to individuals moving in to allow staff to get to know individuals better. We worked in collaboration with schools and the multi-disciplinary team to understand people's needs and enable a smooth transition process.

Individualised support plans were created before the individuals moved in. Plans focused on assessing abilities and setting positive, achievable outcomes. With the support of the multi-disciplinary team, strategies were implemented to reduce behaviours of concern by identifying triggers and adopt early intervention approaches, particularly in new or unfamiliar settings.



NEW SUPPORTED LIVING SERVICE

Successes so far:

Travel training: Staff have provided consistent travel training, resulting in one individual now being able to travel independently to work.

Skills teaching: Staff have focused on increasing cooking skills, emphasising preference, choice, culture and healthy nutrition. Individuals are being taught the importance of cleanliness and its impact on well-being.

New experiences: Residents have enjoyed trips to the Balloon Museum, Brighton, biking riding at Dulwich Park and festivals at the Horniman's Museum. Two individuals took part in a Cancer Research Swimathon, raising £500. Individuals also take part in new regular activities like swimming and bowling.

Employment: One individual was supported to secure a voluntary job at a local sailing club.

Education: Several tenants have enrolled in adult education courses, with one pursuing carpentry and joinery at Lewisham College.

Social skills: Group outings have been promoted and encouraged since the service opened, to allow individuals to get to know each other and develop relationships. Staff continue to recognise the challenges some individuals face with socialising and understanding in social situations. Individuals are supported to recognise other people's routines and rituals.

Feedback:

"I've learned so much, from cooking to budgeting, and have enjoyed trying new things."- Person we support

"The staff are truly invested in each individual's well-being and progress."- Family member

"The team's professionalism and dedication have made a real difference."- Social worker

We are extremely proud of the progress these young adults are making and are grateful for the continued hard work of our staff team. Together, we are promoting independence and improving lives.

NOURISH ROLL OUT

In alignment with NHS England's push for digital transformation, social care providers were encouraged to implement a digital care planning system. We saw this as an opportunity to modernise our operations. A shift to digital would not only reduce our environmental footprint and cut costs on printing and stationery, but also provide more accurate, real-time records, minimise admin time, and enable more detailed reporting. In April 2023, we began the search for a platform that would best meet the needs of our organisation. After attending conferences, engaging in demonstrations, and conducting in-depth research, we selected Nourish as our digital care solution. Its customisability, ease of use, and adaptability were features we felt aligned with our goals.

Recognising the potential risks of transitioning to a digital platform, we took proactive steps to mitigate them. A detailed business case was developed and successfully presented to our Board of Trustees, outlining both the benefits and challenges. We understood that the move to a digital platform would involve significant costs, including implementation fees, device purchases, and ongoing annual expenses. To alleviate this, we applied for the Digital Transformation Fund, a grant administered by the NHS to support care providers in adopting digital technology. Though the application process was complex, we were thrilled to secure nearly £20,000 in funding.

Following this success, we began the implementation phase. Seven managers and Directors were trained by Nourish on the system, and user accounts for both staff and people we support were established. To ensure a smooth implementation, we divided the organisation into two groups. The first group was trained and used the system for a month as a trial period, enabling us to apply lessons learned when rolling out the system to the second group. The entire process took around six months.

By June 2024, Nourish was fully integrated across the organisation. We have already witnessed significant improvements in service delivery, with positive feedback from staff across all levels. The platform has been widely praised for reducing administrative workloads and providing up-to-date, accurate information.

"For me, the change has been great. I can access information from anywhere, monitor daily activities, and track levels of engagement. Since its digital, I've significantly reduced printing, which will have a huge environmental impact."

— KM, Service Manager

"Nourish has streamlined our processes, allowing us to be more organised and focused, which lets us spend more time with the people we support. It's simple and easy to use."

— BB, Senior Support Worker

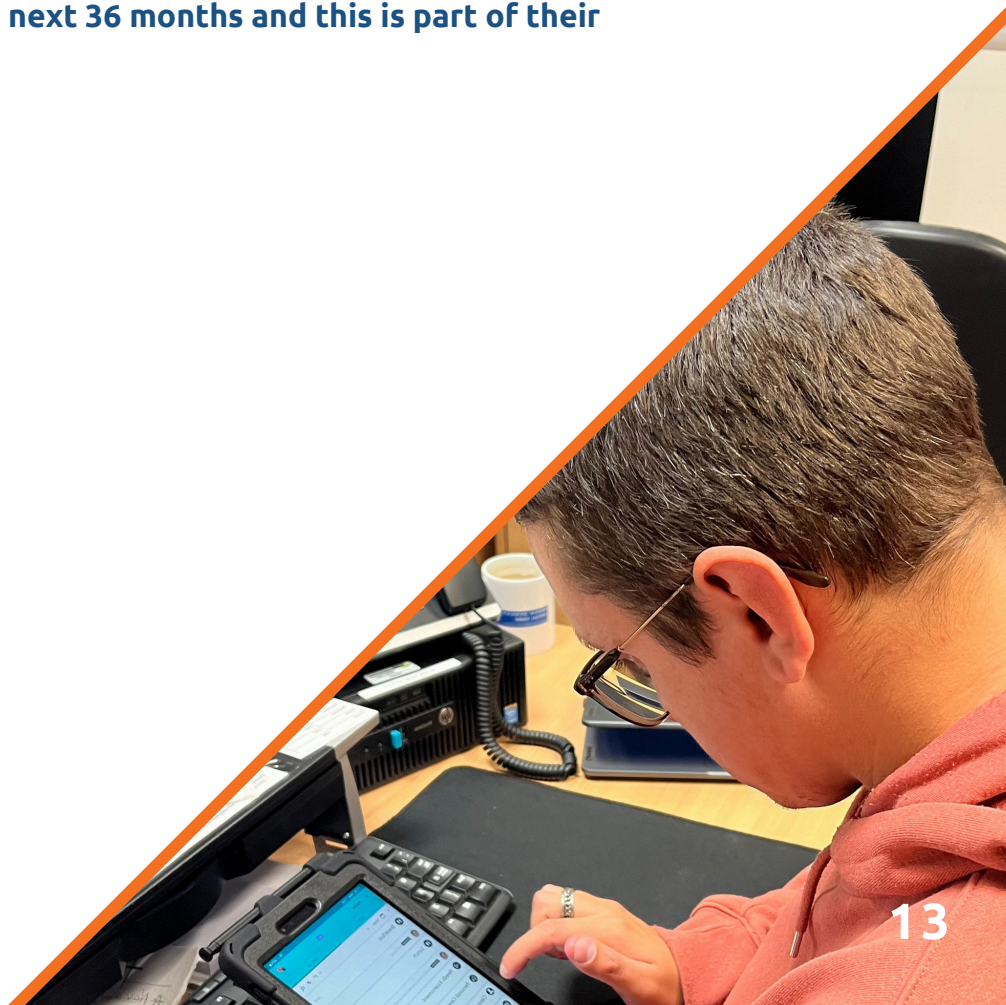
FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

For the financial year ending 31 March 2024, the Charity reported a deficit of £233,774. (2023: a deficit of £132,849) Although this represents a material increase in the deficit, it is worth noting that FY24 deficit includes exceptional costs of approximately £100k associated with redundancy costs.

Our main sources of income are from spot contracts, day services, floating support services (outreach) and housing management. Our principal funder is Lewisham Council; we also receive funding from other Local Authorities, namely Bromley and Southwark.

Our main area of expenditure is staff costs directly attributed to meeting the support needs of people we support. We also have central management costs which are aimed at providing vital support, administration, and management to the core support functions.

The charity is committed to reducing the operating deficit and developing its financial resilience over the next 36 months and this is part of their strategic document.



FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

A summary of the main highlights for FY 24 are:

Income

Sources of Income Financial year 24:

- Spot contracts - £7,264,673
- Day services - £273,226
- Floating support services (Outreach)- £171,984
- Housing management- £ 954,027
- Voluntary Income -£ 3,546
- Investment Income -£17,830
- Total Income: £8,685,285

Expenses

- Direct Support Costs - £7,315,064
- Direct Housing Costs- £ 724,056
- Central Overhead Costs: £879,938
- Total Expenses: £8,919,059

Financial Health

- Net Assets: £1,602,396
- Cash: £1,394,944
- Reserves: £2,157,490 (this includes a £510k revaluation reserve)

The main ethos of our financial strategy is to become financially strong and sustainable. We plan a deficit of approximately 1.5% for the coming year whilst we lay out our strategic 3 -year plan.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

We are targeting growth to provide an exceptional service to those who need it, whilst achieving economies of scale in a geographically concentrated region.

We will continue innovating to find ways to increase financial sustainability. These will include increased donations, fundraising on a larger scale, higher value grant applications, extended VAT optimization to more services, in-house payroll services to reduce costs.

The charity's policy is to hold at least 2 months of annual income to enable the organisation to survive in the event of a "market shock" and to help the charity operate effectively. The reserves policy and the level of reserves are held under review in line with the risk register updates. Aurora Nexus defines free reserves as unrestricted funds. As of 31st March 2024 this value is £2,157,490 (£1,647,490 plus £510,000). This includes a designated revaluation reserve of £510k which the organisation holds. This reserve relates to the revaluation of Geoffrey Road, a three bedded property owned by the Charity since 1996. We estimate 60% of the current market value (£850k at November 23) can be used as collateral in the event of a loss of liquidity.

Cash not required in the short or medium term is invested in fixed deposit accounts for 3 to 12 months agreed fixed terms. This is designed to raise interest income. This is situated with reputable banks in the UK providing the best interest rates with minimum risk of loss. Any cash surplus to our daily requirements but which is needed to fund on-going working capital is invested in an instant access savings account.



COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES:

We have participated in Lewisham Speaking Up, Lewisham providers forums, Brighter Horizons BBQ, Bromley day service events, Mental health forum, Bromley transitions event, Pan London IPC training, Skills for Care Managers Networking events, The Autism Show, a number of VODG events and the Lewisham recruitment fair

PARTNERSHIPS

KEY PARTNERS:

Lewisham, Bromley and Southwark Commissioning and Social work teams, multi-disciplinary teams across the 3 boroughs and housing associations (L&Q, Hyde, A2 Dominion, Hexagon)





STORIES OF IMPACT

SEAN FINDS A NEW VOICE IN HIS 62ND YEAR

It was earlier this year that my brother Sean gained a new voice which has taken his communication to new levels.

I grew up with Sean and he was a tireless and highly energised brother. Sean is unable to hear or speak and has limited vision. Such has never held Sean back. Sean would sign at Olympic speed. At similar frenetic speed, Sean would write key words and draw intricate pictures for those who couldn't sign. Sean's desire to communicate and interact with the world around him knew no bounds.

Unfortunately, following some life-saving spinal surgery in 2014, Sean lost his mobility and more recently the power in his one remaining hand available for signing. However, this did not diminish Sean's desire to be understood by all and for him to engage with his community. Consequently, the race was on to secure tools that would help Sean gain a spontaneous voice once more.

The staff at Kingfisher Mews, the Assistive Communications and Speech and Language Teams all worked collaboratively with Sean and I to put together a bespoke range of icons and key words that would form the basis of the Think SmartBox screens that Sean would engage with to generate speech for all to hear.

SEAN FINDS A NEW VOICE IN HIS 62ND YEAR

Sean now has use of a Think SmartBox communication device. Essentially, this is a cleverly upgraded tablet which allows users to select from a range of icons and text what they would like to convey to others. Sean uses the scanning option and then clicks a button and the selected item is converted into speech. At first, Sean retained the ability to click the selected icon or text using a button much like you might find a gamer using. Unfortunately, Sean no longer has this level of dexterity and now utilises a switch located at head height. Sean is still adapting to this new technology but it holds much promise and he is resolutely focused on making the very best of its potential.

Sean's face lit up like a firework when he first realised that others around him could instantly hear the speech generated by his device. From my perspective, it was very moving to hear for the very first time a voice attached to what Sean was precisely selecting from the icons and text on the screen. Sean's enthusiasm meant that he inadvertently selected and repeated one icon several times which generated the very clear command that he wanted: a McDonald's cheeseburger for lunch! From this point forward there was no of escaping the way this device had significantly re-empowered Sean's ability to communicate with all at will. Truly a miracle only made possible by all those who helped secure this technology for Sean. I know that Sean is truly thankful for the efforts of all those who helped make this device and its options work for him.

-NICK MATTHEWS -SEAN'S BROTHER



FUTURE PLANS AND GOALS

SHORT-TERM GOALS: 1 YEAR PLAN

2024/25 WE WANT TO FOCUS ON:

- **Retendering for existing services in Lewisham and Southwark**
- **Tendering for new services in Lewisham, Southwark and Bromley**
- **Tendering for new services in additional London Boroughs**
- **Working with property developers and registered social landlords to develop new supported living services**
- **Developing specialist services, such as dementia services**

LONG-TERM GOALS: FOR THE NEXT 3-5 YEARS

- **Tendering for services outside of London**
- **Developing services for Children and Young people**
- **Expanding our Day opportunities**
- **Becoming experts in our field for specialist provision**
- **Developing employability services for the people we support**



UPCOMING PROJECTS

ART EXHIBITION

In September 2024 Aurora Nexus will hold its first charitable event to promote the artwork of the people we support. We will showcase the amazing creative talent of several individuals, whilst promoting the work of Aurora Nexus as a charity. We are also using this as an opportunity to launch our new fundraising platform and “Donate here” button on our website. We hope that this event will raise our profile within our communities.

AURORA NEXUS STRATEGY

We are excited to announce the development of our new three-year strategy, set to launch in April 2025. To ensure it reflects the needs of our community, we are seeking valuable input from staff, families and those who use our services. A staff questionnaire has already been distributed, and we will be hosting six strategy planning sessions throughout October and November 2024. These sessions are open to all staff and families, offering an opportunity to actively contribute to shaping the future of Aurora Nexus. We will exchange ideas, share perspectives, and collaboratively define the path for our next chapter.

NEW SERVICE

We have been awarded a tender for a new three-bedroom supported living service in Southwark, set to open by the end of 2024. This service will provide specialised support for adults with complex needs. We are currently in the process of recruiting a manager and staff team and assessing potential referrals.

ADVISORY BOARD

We are setting up our new Advisory Board, which we hope will be fully operational later this year. This smaller, more focused board will consist of four individuals we support, one of whom will serve as the Chair. Their role will be to guide and advise the leadership team, offering valuable insights from lived experience to ensure Aurora Nexus remains centred on the people we support. The Advisory Board will review and provide input on policy and procedure and will play a role in shaping our plans.

NEW ROLES

In August 2024, we introduced a new role: Quality, Inclusion, and Communications (QIC) Manager. This exciting addition is pivotal in preparing us for CQC inspections, identifying trends, and driving improvements to ensure the highest quality of support and services. The QIC Manager will amplify the voices of those we support, involving them in key decisions, gathering their feedback, and guiding their participation in recruitment panels. Additionally, the QIC Manager will lead our internal and external communications, raising awareness of key issues and ensuring that important information is shared effectively across all platforms—including social media, newsletters, and our website.

We are also in the process of recruiting a Grants Fundraiser, who will play a vital role in generating income by securing grants from trusts and foundations. Together, these new roles will empower us to grow, innovate, and continue delivering impactful services.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS FOR THEIR CONTINUED SUPPORT:

- Lewisham Council
- Southwark Council
- Bromley Council
- Ntel Communcations
- Computa Support
- Croner
- Everwell
- Social Care TV
- External Training Partners
- Nourish

DONORS

- South East London ICB- Digital First Programme

STAFF AND BOARD MEMBERS

- **Andrea Wiggins – Previous Chief Executive Officer**
- **Bernie Mayall – Interim Chief Executive Officer**
- **Fahmeeda Amode – Finance Director**
- **Mich Jewell – Director of Governance and Resource**
- **Gail Nicholls – Director Operations, Housing and Development**
- **Joe Donnellan – Director of Operations**
- **Jacqui Shepherd – Director of Inclusion**
- **Gill Bryant – Current Chief Executive Officer**
- **John Anderson – Chair (Resigned 23 May 2024)**
- **Jean Young – Trustee (Interim Chair)**
- **James Robertson – Trustee, Chair of Finance committee and Treasurer**
- **Phil Alvey – Trustee and Chair of Quality, Personnel and Risk**
- **Nicole Allwood – Trustee**
- **Ray Jhattu – Trustee**
- **Ava Zadkhorvash – Trustee**
- **Marcia Bryan – Trustee**





CONTACT INFORMATION

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Instagram- auroranexus8

LinkedIn- Aurora Nexus

AURORA
NEXUS 
Empowering People
with Learning Disabilities



TESTIMONIALS

"I just wanted to get in touch to say what an amazing job you and your staff team did with XX over the last 8 months, but particularly in his last weeks of life. You really honoured XX's wish to be at home, even though I can imagine how tough this must have been for staff. I think you really did XX proud. Your willingness to learn and support your staff team really shone through."

PM- St Christopher's Hospice

"I wanted to take this opportunity to put in writing a compliment about the staff team. They were engaged and enthusiastic. They demonstrated through their comments an understanding of the importance of following a person-centred approach and valuing their clients chosen style of communication. They were keen to generate ideas of appropriate sensory items to use with their clients."

JH- Speech and Language therapist