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National Star Awards winners

Our second year of Star Awards was bigger and better than ever!

This year, we had 513 nominations across all divisions - that's over 100 more than last year - and the standard was exceptional. You've been supporting people to do new things, connect with family and friends, and navigate difficulties with compassion.

The national awards were judged by a panel of three exec and three trustees. Each chose a first, second and third for each category, who then scored 5 points, 3 points and 1 point respectively. Each person made their choices independently and did not know what the other judges had done. Had there been a tie, the number first places would have split the scores, ie the finalist with more first places would have won.

We did not hold an awards ceremony and dinner this year. Instead, members of Exec surprised our winners when they were least expecting it - you can see how below. Winners all received a bespoke trophy and £200 voucher.

This special edition of Stargazer shares who the National winners were, but you can [find out more about this year's Star Awards](#) on [Affinity Talk](#).

- [Working Together Award](#)
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- [Making It Possible Award for Teams](#)

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Star Awards 2025 on Affinity Talk

[Working Together Award](#)



Presented by Deanna Westwood, Director of Quality Improvement and Compliance

People who are open, trustworthy and work collaboratively with others to the benefit of others. They promote inclusion and embrace different perspectives to create a welcoming environment. *For managers of any level and mentors only*

Winner: Paul Taylor, CYP

Paul innocently prepared for a team meeting with his managers and Divisional Director, Joolz Smart, little realising it was all a ruse to get them all together. Deanna was in on the surprise too, so took him off for a discussion on workflows, before he returned to the meeting room to find it decorated and the presentation declaring "Paul Taylor, you are a star!".

The judges recognised that Paul excels at bringing people together and actively

passion, dedication, and support, both for the young people and their families that are supported by CYP, and for his team.

Finalists:

Amanda Turner - Central

Sarah Hastings – East

Nick Miners - Head Office

Cheryl McWilliams – North

Barbara Cowan – Scotland

Sinead O'Loughlin – South

Leanne Rose and Matt Evans (joint) - West

Having Courage Award



Presented by David O'Neill, Director of Business Development

People who have been creative, tried new things, and adapted well to change. *Open to anyone.*

Winner: Bridget Glover and Amanda Clarke, Central

Bridget and Amanda have gone above and beyond by creating Singing for the

Their passion, encouragement, and inclusive approach have transformed confidence levels, enabling people who once struggled with anxiety to perform proudly in public and everyone to make friendships and connections.

Where else could we surprise them with their award than at a Singing for the Soul rehearsal? With their end of year review days away, the pair were delighted to welcome us along to film rehearsals... Watch the video below to see them receive their award.

Finalists:

Charlie Fields – CYP

Jake French and Amy Felton – East

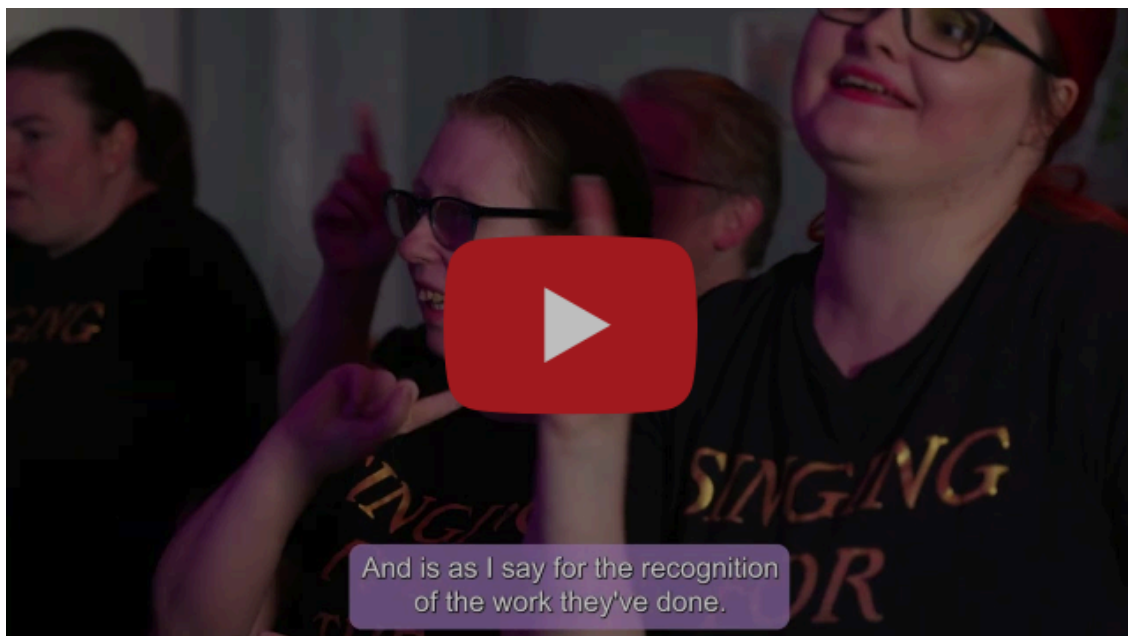
Lee Johnson – Head Office

Vicky Jarosz – North

Leayiona MacCuish – Scotland

Malgorzata Tomala and Sandra Telfer – South

Helen Kingston - West



David O'Neill surprises Bridget and Amanda at rehearsal.

[Making It Possible Award for Teams](#)



Presented by Aileen Everett, Director of People

Teams who live our values and represent the best of Affinity Trust. *Teams only (minimum 3 people).*

Winner: Newbury Management Team, West

This category gave our national judges the hardest time, and had the closest result. A diverse set of teams offering great support in different kinds of difficult circumstances.

Newbury Management impressed by how much positive change they have achieved on all fronts, but most importantly in the quality of support. They've also improved staff morale and support, quality assurance achievements and efficient and effective work systems - which in turn meant significant improvements in efficiency and standards of work.

The team were invited down to Englefield Garden Centre for an open afternoon for people we support. They all joined in a workshop led by Corey, who taught them how to plant a basket of cyclamen, before enjoying some refreshments next door in the village hall.

It was there that Aileen surprised the team with their trophy!

Finalists:

Brisco Avenue Staff Team - Central
Derbyshire Keyworking - CYP
Larkman Lane – East
Recruitment - Head Office

Patrick Court – South



Giving Our Best Award



Presented by Jacqui McCann, Director of Operations

People who take responsibility and go above and beyond to achieve great things. They consistently aim for the highest quality and set a positive example for others to follow. *Open to anyone.*

Winner: Kelly Radford, Central

Kelly consistently goes above and beyond to support both colleagues and the people supported, handling complex challenges without ever seeking the spotlight. Her calm, organised, direct and honest approach makes a real difference every day.

Kelly is another finalist who received several nominations, which include comments like "Her compassion and dedication inspire those around her to raise their own standards and develop professionally," and describes her as "a quietly powerful force within our organisation someone who works tirelessly, cares deeply, and leads with integrity."

Jacqui went along to an early Christmas party organised for people we support to surprise Kelly with her award.

Finalists:

Jan Halliwell - CYP

Elizabeth Kelly – East

Anne Hitchcock – Head Office

Tina Sylvester – North

Farai Ratisayi - West

Supporting People Award



Presented by Kerry Dearden, Chief Executive

People who listen, learn, and build on the strengths of the people we support to deliver high-quality, person-centred outcomes. They support and encourage growth, independence, and empowerment of others. *Excludes Ops Manager level and above.*

Winner: Jack Casson, Central

Following feedback last year, we introduced Supporting People in 2025 to focus on and reward excellence in support. Once again, the finalists had supported people in a variety of ways and in response to very different circumstances, but with one underlying theme: they are changing lives.

Our winner, Jack Casson, is based in Sheffield, and incredibly had only been with Affinity Trust for three months when he was nominated. He received his award at the Loughborough Christmas party.

In that time, he had organised meaningful events and activities for the person he supports, and impressed colleagues with the way he keeps everyone informed to ensure continuity of care.

Jack showed great compassion in helping to sort the items, often in his own time, to ensure the person had a much more dignified home environment. Jack also played a key role in keeping this person in their home when there was pressure from commissioners to move him to residential care. With Jack's input and advocacy, the person can continue living in their cherished childhood home.

Finalists:

Sophie Blackbourn and Aylisha Howard (joint) – CYP

Emmanuel Okonkwo - East

Katie Davis – Head Office

Mel Taggart – North

Charlene Blakely – Scotland

Lavinia Moldovan – South

Richard Goddard - West

People at the Heart Award



Presented by Kerry Dearden, Chief Executive

Nominations from people we support, their families and friends, and the professionals we work with.

Winner: Jamie Humphrey, Central

you to the Caledonian Circle, our Scottish co-production panel for carrying out this difficult task.

Our winner, Jamie, has supported Sam for around five years. It is no exaggeration to say that Jamie has changed Sam's life. In her nomination, Sam's mum Sally said "Jamie has demonstrated a real, sincere and continuous commitment to understand Sam's behaviours and character and has developed strategies to both allow Sam to feel comfortable and secure but to also to continue to motivate and stretch Sam to venture outside of his comfort zone and continue to develop new skills to enable him to live as independently as possible."

As a result, Sam's diet has changed and he is much healthier, enjoying regular exercise in the form of walking, swimming and the gym.

Sam also liked to return to the family home at weekends, but through Jamie's support, he now has weekend trips and activities planned and stays in his own home. In turn, this meant that his parents were able to have a two week holiday for the first time ever. Jamie was on hand to ensure that Sam understood the time difference so he could still facetime his parents, and to reassure Sam that they would be home soon.

Our judges said:

"I think Jamie is an incredible support worker for Sam and an amazing example to other support workers"

"I am so proud to hear that Jamie understands Sam and I think Jamie deserves an award because he is doing a good job".

Kerry presented Jamie with his award at the Loughborough Christmas party.

Finalists:

Giana Meldau – CYP

Sidney Road – East

Leeds Outreach - North

Leayiona MacCuish - Scotland

Keaton Blackburn - South

Gill Manning - West



Centre of Excellence: Kelly Radford pictured with Jack Casson and Jamie Humphrey
- three winners from the same area.

Read all the Star Awards nominations from 2025

[Star Stories](#)

Introducing the amazing Singing for the Soul! (YouTube, 7.30mins)



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Telling the story of the people we support is an important part of what we do – it helps us challenge the stereotype of people with learning disabilities, advocate for people we support and show potential new staff what it is like to work here.

Please let us know about the great things you do by emailing [Communications](#). We can anonymise stories and change names on request, but you must get consent from the person supported to use their image and story.

See it - Say it - Don't Settle... Confidential Reporting via Safecall. Make an online report here.

We are Digital.

If you normally print newsletters off for the communications book, please bear in mind that articles include links to websites, documents and email addresses for convenience.



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