



YMCA WIRRAL

ANNUAL REVIEW 2024-2025

Birkenhead YMCA t/a YMCA WIRRAL

YMCA

Here for young people
Here for communities
Here for you

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YMCA WIRRAL – INTRODUCTION

YMCA Wirral stands in its own right as a pillar in the local community, but we are also a part of a much larger phenomenon. We are proud of our affiliation with the world's largest and oldest youth organisation.

Founded as an inclusive Christian movement, The Young Men's Christian Association spread across England, and then the world. It is our aspiration that YMCA Wirral continues to act as an example of a values-based organization that specifically works toward the betterment of the Wirral.

The year 2024–2025 has been one of growth, resilience, and renewed commitment to our mission of supporting individuals and communities across Wirral. YMCA Wirral continues to provide safe accommodation, support services, and opportunities for personal development, ensuring that vulnerable people in our community are not left behind.

This report outlines our key achievements, challenges, and priorities for the year, reflecting the dedication of our staff, volunteers, trustees, and partners.

MISSION

Helping to build positive futures and overcome barriers for people of all ages.

VISION

As we look forward to 2025–2026, we remain steadfast in our mission: to support individuals, strengthen communities, and create opportunities for all. Together, we will continue to build a brighter future for Wirral.

VALUES

Our values and the way we operate is informed by our years of expertise, our commitment to the Wirral and those who inhabit it, and working together collectively across the staff, management, clientele, and board of trustees.

WE WELCOME

As an inclusive community, we provide refuge to those in need of a safe environment. Regardless of faith, gender, background or circumstances, all are heard and valued.

WE INSPIRE

We strive to help people reach their full potential. We hope to empower people to make the changes they wish for themselves.

WE SPEAK OUT

We are advocates for people and help them to speak up with their own voice.

WE SERVE OTHERS

We are dedicated to improving the quality of life of those in our care, and the wellbeing of the Wirral as a whole.

Chair of Board of Trustees Report

SUE NICHOLAS



As I look back on 2024, I have time to reflect on the current situation both locally and globally. Year on year we see an escalation in war and the consequentially suffering of innocent people of all persuasions.

The financial instability in Britain has led to more pressures on family life. The cost of living and unemployment is rising. Drug and alcohol addiction continue to cause concern, but mental health problems have escalated leading to enormous pressure on charities such as ourselves. We have started to address the issues and our very aware we require a different approach in our support.

This coming year Nigel our CEO will be retiring, and after years he will leave a large pair of shoes to fill. He has been an exceptional leader who has through sound business sense and innovation created a stable and well-respected organisation. We now have the opportunity next year with a new CEO to review our methods of support and make the necessary changes to enable us to deliver services more fitting to the current challenges.

The garden continues to provide a restful place for contemplation.

The escalation in challenges has been met by Nigel and his team, and we are delivering an excellent service. I do not underestimate the pressure on our staff and would like to thank them all for their commitment and hard work carried out in 2024.

Once again, I have been fortunate to be supported by a strong and committed board of trustees who have made my job easier.

I am looking forward to and feel confident that we will continue to thrive.

Sue Nicholas
Chair of Trustees

Chief Executive Report

NIGEL HUGHES



This year has been one of continued challenge, reflection, and determination for YMCA Wirral. Our community has felt the sharp and ongoing effects of the cost-of-living crisis, with rising living costs, insecure housing, and stretched public services placing additional pressure on some of the most vulnerable people across the Wirral. Against this backdrop, we have remained resolute in our commitment to ensure that the care, safety, and dignity of those who turn to us for support are never compromised.

As we move further beyond the immediate impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, its longer-term effects have become clearer. For people experiencing homelessness, isolation and exclusion from services were already deeply entrenched challenges. The pandemic intensified these issues, disrupting pathways into health care, treatment, employment, and stable housing. Over the past year, our focus has been on recovery — rebuilding trust, restoring engagement, and strengthening the support networks that our residents rely on to move forward.

Our hostel has continued to operate at near-full capacity, reflecting both the scale of the housing need in the Wirral and the trust placed in us by statutory partners, commissioners, and the wider community. However, we have always been clear that providing a bed is only the beginning. Our work is centred on supporting people with complex needs — including mental ill-health, substance misuse, trauma, and social exclusion — to stabilise their lives and take meaningful steps towards independence.

This work would not be possible without our dedicated staff team. Day in and day out, they show up with professionalism, compassion, and resilience for people who are too often overlooked or misunderstood. They manage complex situations, build relationships rooted in trust, and create environments where change becomes possible. I am deeply grateful for their commitment, adaptability, and belief in the people we serve.

We are equally thankful for our volunteers, whose generosity of time and spirit adds immense value to our services. Whether supporting activities, offering practical help, or simply providing conversation and connection, our volunteers demonstrate to residents that the Wirral is a place of kindness, welcome, and non-judgement. Their involvement enriches our community and reminds us of the power of human connection.

Partnership remains central to our approach. Over the past year, we have worked closely with a wide range of organisations across the voluntary, statutory, and health sectors to provide holistic, wraparound support. From mental health services and substance misuse providers, to housing partners, local authorities, and community groups, these collaborations allow us to respond to the diverse and overlapping needs of our residents. No single organisation can address homelessness alone, and we are proud to be part of a network committed to shared solutions.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to our Board of Trustees. Their governance, strategic oversight, and unwavering commitment to our mission have been vital during a period of ongoing uncertainty and change. Their support ensures that YMCA Wirral remains well-led, values-driven, and focused on long-term sustainability and impact.

As we look ahead, our ambition is clear. We want to continue strengthening our services, developing psychologically informed approaches, expanding meaningful activities, and improving pathways into move-on accommodation. While the challenges facing our community remain significant, so too does our determination to respond with compassion, creativity, and collaboration.

I am proud of what we have achieved together this year and grateful to everyone — staff, volunteers, partners, trustees, and supporters — who has played a part in supporting YMCA Wirral and the people who rely on us.

Nigel Hughes
Chief Executive

CASE STUDY

Shawn's story: From illegal eviction to stability

‘In my view, YMCA Wirral does a great job in the face of very challenging circumstances. It most certainly saves the lives of individuals where genuine need is identified.’

Shawn's (pseudonym) experience with homelessness began after finding the lock to his flat changed, becoming illegally evicted. After the end of his contract with the RAF, it became tense with his landlord. The loss of employment and continual harassment from his landlord acted as catalysts for his mental health deterioration. Shawn withdrew from society. Confined in his flat, he began to drink excessively. After illegal eviction, he ended up rough sleeping on the streets of Liverpool for four months.

Shawn was put in touch with our RSI team. From the first night, the YMCA provided safety, warmth and people with compassion to understand his circumstances. Slowly, Shawn started to regain a sense of routine and rebuild his self-worth. With basic needs met, he was able to start tackling his mental struggles, building resilience and a hope for better future.

Shawn now resides at low-level support accommodation for residents ready to transition into independent living. Throughout his time as a resident, he has made connections with fellow residents. Together they have supported each other to embrace their creative sides with upcycling furniture, baking, and sketching.

‘(Homeless people) do get a bad rap. They get bunched up into that homogenous group which they're not.’

Shawn brought to light one important issue: the public perceives those facing homelessness as the cause for their own dilemma. Yet his experience shows how quickly life can unravel due to events outside of our control. Everyone's story is unique and there is not a single type of person or choice that explains homelessness.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

SUPPORT & ADVICE

We aim to be there for all those in need of our support. Because of the diverse and complex needs of our clientele, it's essential that we work closely alongside other services to ensure that our community has access to the specific support needed for each. Thanks to our links with various organisations such as Wirral Mind, Heart4Refugees, Tomorrow's Women and many more, we can provide person-centred and individual support. With our strong foundation of links with relevant services, we are prepared to help anyone who comes through our doors.

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Our staff offer a range of training and education opportunities to our clientele to prepare them for societal reintegration and independence. From life skills, to budgeting, to digital skills, we engage with residents to enable them to thrive.

HOUSING & SUPPORTING SERVICES

Housing is an integral component of our service to the community. This year, we are proud to have provided emergency and supported accommodation to over 300 individuals experiencing homelessness. We have strengthened partnerships with local authorities and housing providers to improve pathways out of homelessness.

We look to expand our housing provisions to meet the demand of our services, and to continue to help clients adjust in their transition to independence.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

We recognise the plethora of benefits of engagement with health and wellbeing.

One means of promoting health and wellbeing is our Alcohol Awareness Hub, encouraging healthier lifestyles among residents by providing alternatives to alcohol, and minimizing harm.

Our collaboration with the NHS and local charities to deliver targeted health interventions is a vital resource, allowing for our clientele to access health services they would otherwise struggle to utilise.

We take resident feedback onboard to plan day trips such as hikes. A client-led programme of activities is key to empowerment, productive activity, and wellbeing.



Alison McGovern MP meets our residents

SOCIAL STANDING

We are committed to being a positive, responsible presence within the Birkenhead community. We maintain regular and open communication with residents and businesses neighbouring our premises, ensuring concerns are addressed promptly and relationships remain constructive and respectful. This proactive approach has helped foster trust and mutual understanding.

We work closely with Merseyside Police and other statutory partners to promote safety, reduce anti-social behaviour, and support some of the most vulnerable people in our community. Through partnership working, information sharing, and joint problem-solving, we contribute to wider efforts to improve community wellbeing.

Alongside this, we actively encourage our residents to engage positively with the local area through volunteering, community activities, and environmental initiatives. By creating opportunities for residents to give back, we help challenge stigma around homelessness and promote social cohesion.

As a result, YMCA Wirral continues to develop a strong and visible profile locally, recognised as both a vital service provider and a constructive community partner.



Our annual Ukelele performance

LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

2025 will mark a significant moment in YMCA Wirral's history as our Chief Executive Officer, Nigel, announces his retirement. Nigel has led the organisation with vision, compassion, and determination, guiding YMCA Wirral through periods of challenge and growth.

The Board of Trustees has begun the process of appointing a new CEO to continue this legacy and lead the organisation into its next chapter. This transition will be carefully managed to ensure continuity of services and stability for staff, volunteers, and the communities we serve.

We extend our deepest gratitude to Nigel for his years of dedicated service and leadership, and we look forward to welcoming new leadership that will build upon the strong foundations he has established.



Arts and crafts session

A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

At YMCA Wirral, our work is grounded in a psychologically informed approach that recognises the impact of trauma, adversity, and exclusion. Many of our residents experience difficulties with emotional regulation, trust, impulse control and social engagement as a result of prolonged trauma and instability. When “challenging” behavior presents, we seek to understand what sits beneath them and respond with compassion, consistency, and curiosity.

We align our practice with the principles of a Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE), where relationships are recognised as the primary tool for change. Frontline staff are supported to build meaningful, boundaried relationships that promote safety, dignity, and recovery, ensuring that people with complex needs are not excluded from support. We prioritise continuity of care and work creatively with behaviour that might otherwise lead to disengagement or breakdown.

Staff wellbeing and reflective practice are central to this approach. We recognise that supporting people with complex trauma requires space for staff to reflect, learn, and develop resilience. Whether it’s considering the impact of adverse childhood experiences, neurodiversity, addiction, brain injury, instability, or an overlap of multiple factors, we look to upskill staff to feel confident supporting all clients, in all stages of their lives.

The physical and social environment also plays a critical role. We are actively reviewing and adapting our spaces to better support emotional safety, engagement, and regulation, informed by resident feedback and emerging evidence.

Our psychologically informed approach is not a fixed model, but an evolving framework that helps us embed good practice, learn collectively, and respond more effectively to the complex and diverse needs of our community.



The garden in bloom

EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

At YMCA Wirral, we provide vital accommodation and support for single homeless adults with complex needs across the Wirral. Our 56-bed hostel offers temporary en-suite rooms, giving individuals a safe and secure environment while they begin to rebuild their lives. We recognise that homelessness is never a one-size-fits-all issue, which is why our approach is tailored to each person. Our dedicated team works closely with residents to identify their needs and aspirations, with the ultimate goal of helping them move on to more stable and long-term housing. This may include supported living, securing their own tenancy, or accessing specialist services such as detox and rehabilitation programmes.

In addition to our main hostel provision, we operate a 6-bed triage service designed specifically for those who are street homeless. This emergency accommodation offers immediate respite, providing a warm and safe room while our staff support individuals in finding suitable temporary

housing. For those in urgent need, we also run a “sit-up” service, where emergency camp beds are placed in communal areas of the hostel. This ensures that even more people can be brought off the streets and given a safe place to rest, particularly during times of crisis or severe weather.

We also provide move-on accommodation options, including a supported living house staffed 24/7, as well as dispersed houses in the community that offer fully independent living with “arms length” support.

Our services are built on compassion, dignity, and practical support. By offering a range of accommodation options and personalised pathways, YMCA Wirral strives not only to meet immediate needs but also to empower individuals to take positive steps towards independence and stability. Every bed, every room, and every conversation is part of our commitment to ending homelessness and giving people the chance to thrive.

94 individuals moved in to a core bed in the hostel.

The Primary presenting needs of these 94 individuals include:

- ▶ **21** alcohol
- ▶ **32** substance misuse
- ▶ **8** alcohol & substance misuse
- ▶ **12** asylum seekers
- ▶ **10** mental health
- ▶ **11** offending



CASE STUDY

Ivy's story: Adjusting to life at the YMCA

Ivy (pseudonym) came to YMCA Wirral immediately after being released from prison. Having experienced a breakdown in family relationships due to her gender identity, she had nowhere else to turn. Since arriving, she has adjusted remarkably well to life at the YMCA and become an active and valued member of our community.

Ivy has also come to us on a separate occasion:

‘ I fell in a pond when I was homeless – I had nowhere to wash my clothes other than a pond so when I was washing, I slipped in – and I was put in touch with the YMCA here and Micky washed my clothes and I got new ones too. The way it was dealt with was very professional. And if it wasn't for that I would have got hypothermia. ’

Ivy is a regular at our art sessions, run by Pam, Rita, and Claire, where her creativity truly shines. She's also known for her kind heart — often seen buying treats for our resident cat, or spending time in our garden whatever the weather.

Every now and then, Ivy takes a well-deserved “reset day” — complete with her favorite snacks, a new skincare routine, and a quiet day of comfort with a duvet and good music.

A naturally creative spirit, Ivy always has a music project on the go. Her work draws inspiration from nature, personal experience, and the ever-evolving music scene.

HOMELESSNESS OUTREACH

The RSI Team Wirral supports people sleeping rough across the area. They carry out nightly outreach to locate and engage rough sleepers, offering immediate help and welfare checks. The team provides practical housing support, guiding people into emergency accommodation and toward long-term solutions. Working closely with local services, they ensure individuals receive support to move from homelessness into hostel accommodation or supported living. They also respond to alerts from StreetLink, where the public can report rough sleepers, helping to tackle street homelessness and improve community safety.

In 2024/25 we provided over **1,711** bed night spaces to homeless individuals and our Outreach team supported **319** rough sleepers with a Wirral connection.

▶ RSI Team supported – **319** in the year:



▶ **93** Street Link Alerts received and followed up.

▶ **1** moved into their own private tenancy.

▶ **113** placed into supported accommodation.

▶ **7** re-engaged back to their family / local area.

▶ **1** supported into a care home.

▶ **12** temporarily placed in BB/ Hotels/accommodated under SWEP

▶ **4** taken to and admitted to hospital.

▶ **7** entrenched rough sleepers accommodated.

▶ Numbers in triage – **274** individuals:



MOVING ON

YMCA Wirral is dedicated to supporting homeless individuals and those at risk across the Wirral by offering a comprehensive pathway of safe, supported accommodation designed to promote independence and transform lives.

Our main offer is the YMCA Wirral Hostel Accommodation on Whetstone Lane, Birkenhead. This purpose-built building provides 56 en-suite study bedrooms. We offer a two-tier supported accommodation model: Higher-level supported services and Semi-Independent medium supported services. Clients work closely with a dedicated Housing Key-worker to create a personalised Support Plan focused on health, wellbeing, life skills, education, employability, and suitability for future independent tenancies. This integrated approach tackles barriers like dependency and mental health issues, ensuring a holistic journey toward recovery and stability.

For those ready to take the next step towards full independence, we offer the Move-On Supported Living Project. This project includes three shared houses that offer a transitional living environment:

- ▶ North Road (houses 6 clients) This property is staffed 24 Hours a day.
- ▶ Whetstone Lane (houses 3 clients)
- ▶ Mostyn Street, Wallasey (houses 3 clients)
- ▶ Clifton Road (houses 4 clients)

These properties provide good standard accommodation, allowing residents to transition from the main hostel into their own property or a smaller shared home while retaining the crucial comfort of knowing they still have dedicated, continuing support from YMCA Wirral staff. This relieves pressure on homelessness services and ensures a smoother, successful move to sustainable independent living within the Wirral.

This service is run by our Housing Officer Andy Topping who is dedicated to providing the clients with ongoing support.



Our narrow boat: The Potential

SUBSTANCE MISUSE WORKER

Annie came to YMCA Wirral in 2021 as a graduate from Liverpool John Moore's University with a passion for helping people, and is now a Substance Misuse & Criminal Justice Practitioner. Her role entails supporting residents around identifying their drug and alcohol use, ensuring partnership working with CGL to get clients engaged with the service and on any relevant opiate substitution medication. She runs daily CGL drop ins with hostel keyworkers, holding regular 2-1 meetings to address client's substance misuse and create rehabilitation planning. Annie is the naloxone lead for our hostel, training staff to use this in the case of an overdose along with running our needle exchange to promote thorough harm reduction for residents and ensuring checks for blood borne viruses and abscesses.

More than this, Annie works closely with probation and the police, ensuring we have full background checks for residents, supporting clients, preventing breaches, court summons and prison sentences.



Annie visiting Heart4Refugees

‘I ensure to identify triggers for clients, encourage positive changes and signposting to relevant services for further support. I also arrange regular multi agency meetings, tackling issues with resident's head on and ensuring all services involved in their support are fully updated with any changes in regards to the client. I am in close correspondence with the funders for my role, public health, which have led to positive community engagement work such as recovery fest, the Recoverist podcast and anti-stigma meetings to tackle the stigmatized view of those facing homeless and addiction.’

In collaboration with LIPA, Annie supports an annual theatre production starring our very own residents. The play is showcased to professionals with the capacity to implement positive systemic changes. It's a highlight of our year here at YMCA Wirral.

CASE STUDY

Michael's story: Finding his feet

‘I was trying to run whilst wearing a chain – and I’m still trying to break free.’

Michael was rough sleeping in an abandoned building when our RSI team offered him a triage bed. After four nights, he was offered a room at the hostel. He shared that it was hard to describe the relief he felt: ‘I was unpacking and crying. It was a saving grace’.

Michael shared his experience of struggling with his sense of self – in his case, after falling out of a building at ten years old and suffering a brain injury, he lost his memory and didn't quite know who he was. In a pursuit to find a sense of belonging, he fell into a crowd that led him down a path toward alcoholism.

‘Being homeless is haunting. At home, taking off your shoes means taking down your defenses — it's where you can be yourself with your guard lowered. When you don't have a place like that,



you stay constantly alert. Even though the YMCA is a step toward independent living, it still feels like home to me. It's a place where I can finally be myself. It's a sanctuary.’

Michael made use of the YMCA Wirral Alcohol Awareness Hub – where he was able to taper off his consumption with the support here. Today, Michael frequents the local library, writes short stories to express himself, and attends group outings. In future, Michael hopes to rejoin the workforce, have a home of his own to host his family, and build a koi pond in his garden!

‘At the YMCA, you are given a chance, regardless of what problems you have. They are patient, but you have to be willing to help yourself.’

PARTNERSHIPS

CHESHIRE BUDDIES

Throughout the spring and summer months, we were proud to continue our partnership with Cheshire Buddies to deliver a series of inclusive waterway activity days, held weekly on Wednesdays. These sessions were designed to give disabled children and young people the opportunity to access new environments, build confidence, and experience the joy of outdoor activity in a safe and supportive setting.

Led by our CEO, Nigel, the programme centered around gentle, accessible water-based experiences that many of the children would not otherwise have the chance to take part in. It served as a chance for children to try something unfamiliar, and experience a sense of independence and achievement outside of their usual routines.

The partnership with Cheshire Buddies was rooted in a shared belief that every child deserves access to enriching experiences, and we were more than happy to play a part in bringing it into fruition.

The programme highlighted the importance of inclusive provision and demonstrated how thoughtful partnerships can open doors, broaden horizons, and create lasting positive memories for young people and their families.

NHS (ONSITE GP & MENTAL HEALTH NURSE)

Kerry is one of our Drug and Alcohol Workers on the Hostel Team at Wirral Ways and comes twice a week. Detox and rehabilitation for clients here isn't always immediately within reach, but that doesn't mean we can't support clients with psycho-social interventions.

‘It’s a really person-centered approach – we meet them where they are at.’

Not all residents are prepared to take steps toward sobriety; and Kerry sees it as her job to mitigate any risks clients might be facing in their addictions. It's a matter of harm minimisation.

Our health team forms the first point of contact for many residents' medical needs, providing an accessible pathway into a



Kerry, Drug and Alcohol Worker

wider network of NHS services. Practitioners can carry out a range of assessments, substance misuse related or otherwise. Importantly, conditions such as Hepatitis C can be treated onsite, removing the barrier of attending external appointments.

Kerry has found that she is typically able to build trust with her patients here at the hostel by assessing their health informally – sometimes a chat in the garden works better than in the doctor’s office. In essence, her approach differs from person to person to shape her intervention around the pace they set.

The compassionate and non-judgmental healthcare approach is evident throughout – for instance: for residents involved in sex work, the team provides essential safeguarding information and protective resources to support safer practices. This integrated model ensures that every resident—regardless of where they are on their journey—is met where they are at.

CAB

YMCA Wirral has recently established a valuable partnership with the local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to enhance the support available to our clients. This collaboration reflects our shared commitment to addressing the wider challenges faced by individuals experiencing homelessness and complex needs.

As part of this partnership, CAB has installed an electronic terminal within our hostel, giving residents direct access to advice and guidance. Through the terminal, clients can request support via email, arrange a call back, or access online resources tailored to their circumstances. This ensures that individuals can quickly connect with professional advice without the barriers of travel or appointment delays.

In addition, CAB now provides a monthly on-site drop-in service at YMCA Wirral, offering what they call “Advice First Aid.” This initiative allows clients to receive immediate, practical guidance on a wide range of issues. Examples include support with benefits and Universal Credit applications, debt management, housing rights, employment queries, and navigating legal or family-related concerns. By bringing this expertise directly into our setting, clients are able to access trusted advice in a familiar and supportive environment.

This partnership strengthens our holistic approach to care, ensuring that alongside safe accommodation, residents are empowered with the knowledge and tools they need to overcome barriers and move towards independence. It represents a significant step in providing integrated support that addresses both immediate needs and longer-term stability.



In-house international BBQ

THANK YOU!

Thank you to all our stakeholders, funders, supporters and friends. Without your help and generosity, we could not continue delivering our vital services to thousands of local people within our community.

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**Here for young people
Here for communities
Here for you**

YMCA enables people to develop their full potential in mind, body and spirit. Inspired by, and faithful to, our Christian values, we create supportive, inclusive and energising communities, where young people can truly belong, contribute and thrive.

FAMILY & YOUTH WORK

HEALTH & WELLBEING

HOUSING

TRAINING & EDUCATION

SUPPORT & ADVICE