

The logo consists of a white hexagon with a thick orange border. Inside the hexagon is a dark blue circle, also with a thick orange border. The text 'The BigLife group' is centered within the circle.

**The  
BigLife  
group**

# **Big Life Changes**

2012-2017



# Introduction

In the five years between 2012 and 2017, Big Life has expanded and improved, supporting people to change their lives. We've offered opportunities and services covering health and wellbeing, skills and employment, and children and families.

Throughout, we have remained committed to our mission, to change lives and create opportunities for people who have the least.

Five years on, and with a new business plan for 2017-2020, we take a look back at some of the stories, services and data that best demonstrate our impact on the lives of people we work with.

With services from Stockton-on-Tees to Liverpool, covering anything from NHS-commissioned mental health services to producing Big Issue North, these stories offer only a snapshot of the impact that Big Life has had in the last five years.

However, we think they all show the Big Life Way (the common thread that enables our services to achieve what we set out in our business plan in 2012) to give people the opportunities to change their lives.

## *In the last five years...*

We have worked with **214,997** service users

Our health and wellbeing centres in Manchester and Salford were visited **782,205** times

**1,354** people have worked for Big Life

# Tommy's story

*"I couldn't wish for a better job than this, because I know from experience that making just the smallest difference to someone means everything."*

From 1990 until 2013, I was a heroin addict. I also took crack, amphetamines – anything really. And I'd been in prison. From day to day, I was just doing everything that society doesn't approve of.

Eventually, when I'd stopped taking drugs, I decided I wanted to do something different, so I started volunteering at the Pennine Care drug team. I did that for about 18 months. Somehow, I ended up being a service user representative in the tender process for Pathways when it started in April 2014.

About six months later, once Big Life had started to deliver the service, I applied for a role as part of a programme for people who've previously been using services, and I got the job!

When I first started working, I'd not had a legitimate job for more than 20 years – even then, they were jobs that involved no policies or procedures – it was all short term and cash in hand.

I had absolutely no knowledge of real work. My fear was that I was asking dumb questions – it stopped me from asking.

When I first started working at Pathways, my first instinct when someone asked me about my weaknesses or background – even though they wanted to help – was to say 'nothing'. But Jo, who interviewed me, really made me understand that my history wouldn't go against me. I use that memory now with volunteers when I ask that question – I tell them my story so they don't just say 'nothing'.

Of course I had weaknesses – I had anxiety and I was on medication. What was great was that Jo was very open with me that she had her own history of mental health problems, and that made it easier for me to open up about my own issues.

Now I'm on the other side of the fence, I try to remember what it was like to be a service user. When I used to ring services, some people would talk to me like I wasn't

a normal human being, because of all the stigma that goes with drug use.

I know that a lot of people get flustered and nervous when they call Pathways, so I make sure to put them at ease and tell them to take their time. I feel like I have a really good understanding of the reality that our service users face. I couldn't wish for a better job than this, because I know from experience that making just the smallest difference to someone means everything.

Everybody's journey is unique, and everyone who's in recovery will have ups and downs. But when you know that support is there from your employer, it's massive. It's important that people know that having mental health or drug problems isn't the end of the road – I'm proof of that.

***Pathways is a confidential and personalised alcohol and drug recovery service, working from community settings with people in Rochdale, Heywood, Middleton and the Pennines.***





Since Pathways began in 2014, **1,009** people have successfully completed their journey, becoming either drug and alcohol free, or having significantly reduced their use

**413**

people have volunteered their time for us each year on average

In the last five years, our peer-led Self Help drop-in groups have been attended **14,333** times

**34%**

of staff who filled in our annual survey between 2012 and 2017 said they had personal experience of mental distress

# Nergz's story

*“Big Life looked at what I could offer people, not just what I needed for myself. As long as I’m helping people who have been in the same situation as me, I’ll be happy!”*

I came to the UK from Kurdistan in 2005, I had got married and arrived on a visa. I was in Leeds for a week, then moved to Stockton, where we had some family.

It was a very hard time. I couldn’t speak English and I didn’t know anyone. I was with my husband though – and he took me to college and helped me to learn a little bit about English culture.

I had my first child a year later, and a health visitor suggested I joined a playgroup, so I came to The Olive Branch – a session for asylum seekers and refugee families in Stockton – at The Star Children’s Centre.

Because I was going out more, the language came more easily to me. I was also studying English as a Second Language, and volunteering.

One day, I came into the Star for playgroup, and saw a poster advertising a job for

bank staff. I talked to the staff and they said you need to have the right childcare qualifications.

So off I went, and got my qualifications. In January 2013, I got a job with Big Life. I’d come here to go to a playgroup, and slowly, I’d got myself a job. I did a few hours, as a crèche worker, and that’s how everything started. Now, I’ve got level three childcare qualifications, and I’m doing a leadership and management course!

I lead the Olive Branch group now! Around 50 and 60 families come, and I put them down for ESOL courses. Many of these families go on to become volunteers, just like I did. That’s a great experience and the best way to learn the language and culture.

And I can tell them about my life. When I arrived, it was so difficult – I didn’t know anyone, and couldn’t speak a word of English. But that experience is so useful.

Now I meet families in my situation, and I can say ‘look at me – don’t sit at home! Go out and learn things, no one is born knowing everything, you have to try, and never give up’.

Big Life looked at what I could offer people, not just what I needed for myself. The team here are amazing, they support me and make me believe that I can do anything. As long as I’m helping people who have been in the same situation as me, I’ll be happy!

***Our Children’s Centres – two in Manchester and two in Stockton – provide high-quality, welcoming and accessible environments and support services that empower families to achieve their full potential.***



In 2016-17 **114** people volunteered with us in Stockton; 9 went into employment and 57 went onto further training

**69%**

of Being Well Salford staff lived locally, working out of 28 existing communities

**27,263**

families accessed our children's centres or used their services

**33%**

of staff who worked for Big Life in the last five years lived within two miles of their workplace



# Rebecca's story

*“Working Well was different to anywhere else. They looked at me as an individual. They looked at what I wanted to do, and what I needed to work on to get into work, rather than just throwing me straight in.”*

I had been out of employment for 8 years. I've got cerebral palsy and borderline personality disorder. I knew I needed to get help with my health before I could find a job.

The challenge was finding work that was suitable for me. I'd been a nursery nurse, but I was worried about the physical aspects of that job. So, I became depressed; I wasn't sure where I would work or if I would find something suitable.

At the time, I was on the Work Programme, and felt like I was just a number. They just said 'you've got to get a job; you've got to get to work'. It became such a struggle.

At the same time, I was having family problems – I wasn't really in contact with them. Overall, I was in crisis. That's when I got referred to Working Well, and things started to change. It was different to anywhere else. They looked at me as an individual. They asked what I wanted to do, and what I needed to work on to get a job, rather than throwing me straight in.

It made me realise, what I needed to do was start at the bottom, build up my confidence and get back into a routine. They held group sessions, which were a massive help to me. They made me realise that I wasn't alone.

I used to go to the Energise Centre every Tuesday, and we'd look at our strengths and weaknesses, the sort of work we'd want, and how we could get health support. But the biggest thing was getting into a routine and out of the house.

I had a few key workers. After a while, they found me volunteering work. Going out and getting a taste of work after such a long time was daunting – meeting new people and going somewhere I didn't know. But they supported me, even meeting me at home and helping me to get there.

One day, I went to see my key worker. My benefits had been stopped and I still didn't have a job. I felt rock bottom. As I was leaving, my key worker asked if I wanted an

interview with Working Well there and then! I went in for an interview, dressed in scruffy clothes, I didn't know what I was going to say and I hadn't worked for so long.

But, before I even left, I'd been offered the job! I'll never forget it. Everyone in the office was crying. They'd seen me grow from someone who never thought she'd find work, to someone able to work with them.

I've been here eight months now and it's changed my life. Getting a job doesn't mean all my problems have gone, but for the first time, I've actually held down a job that I'm enjoying – and my confidence is returning.

It's not just that Working Well has got me work. They've helped me reconnect with my family, and I've realised that my disabilities are just part of me, they don't define me.

***Working Well supports people who have been through two years of the Work Programme, and remain without employment.***





176

people have found work through Working Well since 2014. 68 had never worked or not worked for more than five years

As well as providing people with a means to earn an income, Big Issue North staff have supported vendors with other aspects of their life on

**5,901** occasions

66

parents at Unity Community Primary school have signed up to Big Chance, enabling them to access courses and volunteering opportunities

In the last five years, **46,664** people accessed our Talking Therapies services

# Abi and Fraser's story

*“Now, he is much more confident with other children we meet, and even talks about some of his friends and teachers at the nursery when we're at home.”*

My son Fraser started at Big Life's nursery in Longsight just after his third birthday.

Fraser has an Autism Spectrum Disorder, and finds it very difficult to think or talk about anything not in the here and now.

He was very difficult to communicate with, and avoided interaction with other children, preferring to be on his own.

Fraser was happy to go to nursery, but refused to join in any group activities. The staff at the nursery worked hard with Fraser, to encourage him to join in and sit with the others at meal and story times.

Gradually, as the staff spent time with him and supported him, Fraser began to sit with other children for longer, until he felt comfortable with the groups.

He also became potty-trained, which he hadn't been previously, after help from the

staff and seeing the other children going to the toilet.

Now, he is much more confident with other children we meet, and even talks about some of his friends and teachers at the nursery when we're at home.

Sometimes he will even tell me about his day at the nursery and what he has done. The lovely people and fun activities at Longsight Nursery have made such an impression on him.

When I come to collect him, the staff are so friendly and tell me about what he has been up to – sometimes he doesn't want to leave! He's even been on a trip to Blackpool Zoo with the rest of the children at the nursery!

By the end of his first year, I noticed such a change when picking him up; I would often find him playing in a small group of children, joining in roleplaying games, and generally

being much more sociable than I have ever seen him before.

It's given me confidence that Fraser will be able to settle in fine at school if he is given the right support, like he has been at Big Life's nursery. Having said that, we will be very sad to leave!

Thank you to everyone who has helped Fraser – we are very grateful to you all.

***Longsight Nursery gives children aged 0-4 the chance to learn through imagination, creativity and play in a safe, fun space.***



**FIRST  
CLASS**

We believe all people deserve a first class service led by them and tailored to their needs

**964**

free nursery education funded places were provided for two year-olds from the most disadvantaged families in Manchester

In the last five years, the recovery rate for people who accessed our Talking Therapy services was **49.6%**, compared to the national benchmark of **46.3%**

**91.7%**

of Skills for Employment clients felt satisfied or very satisfied with their support since the service began in 2016



# 2012-2017 Big Life's Journey



New purpose  
built building for  
Open Door

2012

Big Life begins  
delivering services  
in Stockton on Tees

Big Life launches its  
new business plan

2013

The 1000th edition  
of Big Issue North  
is produced

A new era for Big Life, as  
our first school opens its  
doors in Longsight!

Big Life launches  
innovative mental  
health crisis support –  
to national interest

Our first behaviour-  
change based  
public health  
service begins

Our housing offer  
expands to offer  
supported housing in  
Liverpool

Big Life People – our  
bespoke client management  
system – goes live

2014

Big Life begins delivering  
a Greater Manchester-  
wide employment pilot,  
using a person-centred  
approach.

Big Life take on large  
numbers of NHS  
staff through TUPE  
arrangements for the  
first time

The number of Big  
Life staff reaches 500

500

2015

We begin delivering  
our first drug and  
alcohol recovery  
service

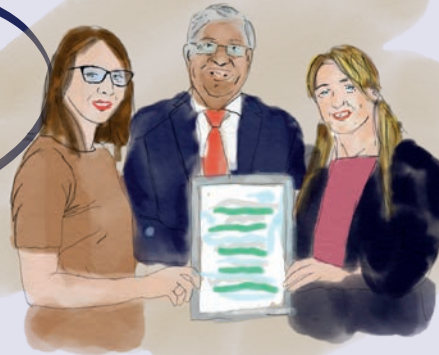
A new Big Life service  
launches in Stockton,  
making the most of  
community assets

As our second  
school opens, the Big  
Life Schools Multi-  
Academy Trust is  
created





Our behaviour change approach wins a national Public Health Minister's award and a Royal Society of Public Health award.



The Harvey Project provides end of life care through its supported housing

Big Life helps create an innovative stepped-down model for family support

The Big Issue North online shops opens its virtual doors



The first Street Noise music concert takes place, raising money for Big Issue North Trust

2016

2017

Celebrities and business people take part in Big Issue North's first Big Sell



Unity Community Primary moves into its new purpose built building



Big Life's first behaviour change app, My Life Goals, is launched

Big Life launches its new business plan for 2017-20

# Alex's story

*I was caught on the streets begging and I thought, right, this is the moment that I can make a change. I started selling Big Issue North, and now, half past seven every morning – boom! I'm out of the house.*

Growing up, I couldn't fit in with anything. I found out I was dyslexic when I was a teenager and, hand-in-hand with that, a big bottle of alcohol came.

And then the death of my grandparents, the split-up of a relationship – it all just came crashing down and I thought, right, I'm just keeping that bottle as my best friend now. And I ran away.

I started off working on the fairs. I worked at V festival. If you were there between 2000 and 2005 then I guarantee that I would have spun you on the waltzer! Then I met a traveller and I went off around Europe.

I've seen some amazing things and some things I never ever want to see again. But it all became about alcohol.

One day, I had a brainwave. I thought, I'm fed up of this, I'm 40 years old. I gave up the alcohol last year and put myself in a hospital. It was difficult getting the

right support. I had to keep turning up at the hospital, nearly killing myself through drinking. They would keep me in for a few days and then send me back out."

I was caught on the streets begging and I thought, right, this is the moment that I can make a change.

I started selling Big Issue North, and now, half past seven every morning – boom! I'm out of the house. That helped me to stay sober – as well as getting my dog Muttley.

Selling the magazine and having Muttley has given me a sense of responsibility. Now I can't be hungover because I need to walk and take care of her.

The team at the magazine have supported me to find ways to build up some confidence and self-esteem. They helped me organise to spend time volunteering at Hollybush, a local conservation centre.

And, in September, after help to apply for the course from our team, I will be starting a new challenge - I'm going on a college course in painting and decorating!

The changes I have made over the past few months have been ground-breaking. I'm feeling so much happier, and have so much confidence. Honestly, I'm unrecognisable from a year ago!

***Big Issue North provides people with few other means the opportunity to earn an income and develop skills to improve their lives***





Everyone has the capacity to change, but we know it's not always easy. That's why we never give up.

In the past five years, **288** Big Issue North vendors have been supported to find accommodation

**44**

of the 176 people who found a job through Working Well did not believe they could find and retain work when they first came to us

Between 2015 and 2017, **92%** of families who worked with our Family in Need Service successfully remained out of social care services

# Sam's story

*“Just knowing that the Sanctuary is there is important. I know the right help is there when I need it, where as in the past I'd struggle to cope every night.”*

In the past seven or so years I've had a lot of involvement with various mental health services following a series of stressful events taking place in my life, which I struggled to cope with, such as my nana passing away and the loss of one of my children.

I often feel very suicidal and in the past I've been sectioned under the mental health act. I feel especially worse in the early hours of the morning when my mind starts to have irrational thoughts.

I have had some serious suicide attempts where I've almost died, but I'm glad I didn't because 95% of the time I don't want to die.

The Sanctuary has provided a safe place where I can go when my mind goes to a dark place.

If it wasn't here for me, I would have been looking on the internet for ways to kill myself or writing suicide notes.

When I first visited the Sanctuary, I was struggling to take my anti-depressants even though I knew they were an important part of my recovery.

While at the Sanctuary, the first thing the worker did was to talk to me about the medication. With his help, I was able to draw up a schedule and begin taking the medication on a regular basis – which has helped a lot.

Previously, I'd had conversations with psychiatrists and medical professionals about the importance of medication, but none of them were able to convince me, like the Sanctuary worker was able to, in a compassionate way, that medication was right for me.

Since the Sanctuary has been here, I've not needed to be in touch with mental health services apart from my fortnightly Community Psychiatric Nurse visits.

Just knowing that the Sanctuary is there is important to me. I know the right help is there when I need it, where as in the past I'd struggle to cope every night.

***The Sanctuary provides 24-hour mental health crisis support, either over the phone or face-to-face, to adults who are experiencing anxiety, panic attacks, depression, suicidal thoughts or are in crisis.***





We work with people not problems. We see the potential in everyone and value life experience.

**1839**

times people have said that without The Sanctuary they would have self-harmed or attempted suicide

Since launching in 2012, Community Voice has provided a platform for **1263** service users to share their views on services in Merseyside

**89%**

of children who have ever attended one of Big Life's schools have English as an additional language

# Kate's story

*“The way the school, nursery and children's centre have worked together is great – it's made such a difference to our family.”*

I've got two children. Joe's at Longsight Community Primary, and Hope goes to Longsight Nursery, in the same building.

When they first went, we had some problems, because I was really struggling to make sure that they attended regularly.

Joe's bright, and was making the progress you'd expect of someone his age, but the school were worried about his attendance.

The nursery were really concerned about Hope. They told me that when she was actually in the nursery – which wasn't that often – she was really badly behaved.

The staff were great with me, and kept in regular contact – it actually meant that Hope started going a bit more regularly – but her behaviour was still bad.

Because they work together, I think that the school and the nursery could see that there were deeper problems.

In the end, the council decided that Joe and Hope were both classed as a Child in Need.

I was devastated at first – I wanted to be a good mum, but I was really struggling. Once you're a Child in Need, there's a team who discuss what you need to do to make things better. They looked at all sorts of things.

With Hope, they felt that her eating habits weren't great, and that was partly why she was badly behaved. They also looked at some of my issues – I've got some medical problems – and how that made it hard for me to get the kids to school or nursery.

The best thing they did was put me on a parenting course. It teaches you skills, but most of all, it gave me confidence that I could be a good mum. After all, no-one knows everything straight away do they? Everyone's got to learn.

The course was at Longsight Children's Centre, in the same building as the school and the nursery. I could do my course, pick up Joe and Hope, without having to travel all over the place. And it meant the staff could see I was trying to do the right thing, and it meant I got to know them better.

You wouldn't believe the difference in us now! I'm much less stressed, and I've got a good relationship with the school and the nursery. I was always defensive before, because I knew things weren't great.

Joe's really shining – he hasn't missed a day of school in five months! He's loving it. And they say that he'll be where he should be in reading, writing and maths this year. Hope's also happier – she's in nursery much more often, and is behaving better and making good progress.

I know I've still got a way to go. We're not the perfect family, but who is? The council obviously think we're moving in the right direction, because they've said neither Joe nor Hope are a Child in Need any more!

***Longsight Community Primary is a Big Life school in south Manchester. It is co-located with a nursery and a children's centre, offering continuity of development and support for children aged 0 to 11, and their families.***





We are not afraid to tread new ground. We learn and innovate to respond to new challenges.

Of the **30** children who started reception at Longsight Community Primary in September 2016 **13** had attended Longsight nurse

**188**

people accessed supported housing through the Harvey Project – including six couples and three people with pets, unique among supported housing services

Since launching in 2015, **266** families have been supported by A Fairer Start Stockton, an innovative programme using volunteer champions to improve outcomes for 0-3 year olds in Stockton-on-Tees

# Dave's story

*“I realised I was looking forward to seeing my coach and having a conversation with her – telling her what had gone well and what hadn't. It felt like a real light at the tunnel moment”*

For a long time, I didn't think I could be helped. I had agoraphobia, depression and panic attacks. I locked myself away for such a long time; I felt like I wasn't part of the human race.

I tried group therapy, which was an absolute disaster. I couldn't cope with groups of people, and I ended up coming out of the sessions feeling worse than when I came in. I really thought I was wasting everybody's time going to the sessions.

As well as my agoraphobia and depression, I wanted to be more active and lose weight, and improve my mood, self-esteem and self-confidence. I was sent to Being Well Salford by my doctor.

It took all of my family to get me there – and make me stay there. My first appointment was so stressful. When I went into the room, I felt like I was going to my execution.

My coach, Debs, was very understanding, and did all the talking, because all I could

do was give yes and no answers, sweat a lot, and just about stay in the room!

But Debs' reassuring manner calmed me down, and I started to listen to her. As the session went on, what I was being told started to make sense, and I had hope that I could be helped at last.

We set goals and I started making progress, getting out, meeting people and being more active. It was about the fourth session, when I woke up and realised I was looking forward to seeing my coach and having a conversation with her – telling her what had gone well and what hadn't. It felt like a real light at the end of the tunnel moment, when I thought 'I might actually get better here'.

Debs was creative about encouraging me to do more. At one of my sessions, we started talking about my love of dogs, and the fact that my sister had just got a Labrador. As we were talking, the conversation came round to me going walking with my sister and her dogs – getting out of the house and

meeting people. I was killing two birds with one stone.

Now that I'm leaving Being Well Salford and I'm getting on top of things, I thought that things would swing along just fine – no more depression or panic attacks, and I'd walk through life with a smile on my face. That's wrong of course! I've had the illness for so long that it'll always be a part of me.

When my mood goes down, in the past this would have been the start of a deep depression, and I wouldn't want to see anyone or do anything. Now, I'm more in control of myself, and I know that feeling down isn't the end of the world, and I can carry on with my life. I've proved to myself that I can cope with depression, and it doesn't define who I am.

***Being Well Salford ran from 2013 to 2017, offering coaching support to address multiple issues including mood, weight, activity levels, smoking or alcohol intake.***





We work in partnership to achieve more together than we can alone.

90%

of participants in Being Well Salford improved their WEMWBS score, a well-recognised measure of mental wellbeing

In the last five years, our four health and wellbeing centres, have been visited **782,205** times, acting as a hub for people and organisations in Hulme, Moss Side and Salford

Between 2014 and 2017, the Working Well service referred clients to other organisations **1,148** times

# The next three years

*With our new business plan for 2017 to 2020, Big Life will continue to change lives, by creating opportunities, doing good business, improving what we do and being influential.*

## Creating opportunities

We will start where people are at, and support them to get to where they want to be. By 2020...

- We will work with more than 100,000 people every year across our services.
- We will employ more people with life experience of addiction and mental health issues.
- We will provide more opportunities for volunteers and people on work placements.

## Doing good business

By 2020, we will be more efficient, doubling our turnover, and expanding our services, through:

- A total turnover of at least £30m across all Big Life services.
- A strong balance sheet, increasing our current net assets to £2.5m across the group.
- A mix of income streams; 76% through contracts, 16% through trade and the rest through grants.

## Improving what we do

We will have a workforce committed to our mission and values to help us be the best we can be, with:

- 96% of staff in The Big Life group committed to achieving our mission.
- Robust data management and IT systems across the group.
- Services that embrace technology without leaving people behind.

## Being influential

We will champion people who have the least but need the best, by...

- Fighting for the issues that really matter to the people that we work with.
- Building a network of local and national stakeholders who champion our mission.
- Creating social accounts that demonstrate our impact on the world around us.









**The Big Life group**

1st Floor, 463 Stretford Road, Manchester M16 9AB

[www.thebiglifegroup.com](http://www.thebiglifegroup.com)

 @biglifetweets