

# Heads-Up

Your quarterly Look Ahead customer newsletter. Winter 2025/26

## A note from Sharheena, this edition's Guest Editor



Hello, and welcome to another edition of Heads-Up. As we start a fresh year, I want to invite you to try something new. If you haven't volunteered at LookAhead, I recommend that you give it a try. It's great, believe me.

I'm quite new to Look Ahead, I drop in at Barnsley Street Neighbourhood Mental Health Centre when I need some support. The staff are friendly. I wanted to make sure others can have the same experience as me, so I started volunteering on interview panels

to help recruit the right staff for the service.

Since then, I have shared my ideas with Look Ahead to help design a mental health service – how to make it comfortable and homely. I'm planning to run pampering sessions with my fellow customers as well.

Getting involved keeps me busy, I really enjoy it, I'm helping my community. I want others to feel the same way, **so if you haven't gotten involved at Look Ahead yet, why not start off this new year by giving it a try?**

Sharheena

Guest Editor

FIND OUT  
MORE



A piece of art by a Look Ahead customer.

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To send us your art, and find out more about opportunities to get involved, speak to your support worker or email the Co-Production Team at [gettinginvolved@lookahead.org.uk](mailto:gettinginvolved@lookahead.org.uk)

Editorial Team: Sharron, Sharheena, Louise, Raf, Sharif, John, Kate, Diane, and Edward.

## MARK'S STORY



**Mark was a customer at Look Ahead's Heaney Hub Homelessness Service but has since moved to a new home. Mark shared his story in an interview with John.**

I went to work one day, and when I got home, the locks had been changed. I had been illegally evicted. I spent a month on the streets, people used to beat me, urinate on me, and burn my property. But then, I got an assessment at Look Ahead and thankfully got a room.

I was at Look Ahead's Heaney Hub service for about 15 months, and it's been around a year

since I moved on. The housing officer at my new accommodation, the council, and Heaney Hub's move-on officer, Paul, all collaborated to support me. Paul attended viewings with me, helped me apply for PIP and sheltered housing. With his support, I got the right documents ready to move. I signed a year's tenancy. It was a full tenancy, but a bit like a probation period to make sure I could pay my bills on time and look after the flat. I have now signed my permanent rolling tenancy.

The biggest challenge around my move was moving my belongings. My advice is start packing early if you can. Think about how you will move your belongings in manageable ways like boxes and suitcases.

My cats, Hoover and Tula are my favourite thing about my new home. If you want pets, make sure you ask about it first before signing your tenancy.



## MEET DARREN THE POET

Darren from our East London Apartments (ELA) service shared his love of poetry in an interview with Diane and Sharif.

My name is Darren, I live at ELA. I love it here. I'm so chilled out. The staff are next level, I think they care too much sometimes. It really helps though. I couldn't ask for more from them. One of my favourite activities here is writing poems. Poetry keeps me going. I used to read poems to my first girlfriend. But I started writing in prison, aged 21.

Once, I was so angry. I was about to have a fight, but a prison officer gave me a pen and paper. I wrote my anger down instead. It kept coming, word after word. He gave me an alternative, and I made the most of it.

My poems reflect the love I have for people, the world, my ancestors and the need to end nuclear weapons. Here are a few of my words:

*These feelings, these emotions I receive as I believe I am more than inclined,*

*I am compelled, obliged with your most beautiful minds to share.*

*I humbly beseech thee, I ask you join me in this momentary, magic fantasy of mine, or is it?*

*I know a little part of you desires to dare.*

**To read more of Darren's poetry, contact [gettinginvolved@lookahead.org.uk](mailto:gettinginvolved@lookahead.org.uk)**

# PETAL'S STORY

Petal joined our peer support volunteering programme and later became a bank support worker.

I became a Look Ahead customer after experiencing homelessness. Sleeping rough affected my mental health, and I needed some support. Look Ahead helped me live independently. I took a health and social care course and started working as a paid carer. When the job became overwhelming, I spoke to the service manager who put me in touch with Look Ahead's Co-production Team. The team helped me become a Peer Support Volunteer (PSV) instead. I started out at a mental health service in west London.

As a PSV, I supported customers in activities like cooking and art, and helped with shopping and appointments. Being a PSV made me feel empowered to get up every morning and put a smile on someone's face. Seeing how customers enjoyed the activities was so uplifting.

After a year, I became a bank support worker, doing similar tasks but with added responsibilities like paperwork and medication support. I've gained confidence and I really enjoy working with customers. I've worked at three different



services now and aim to become a permanent support worker and team leader.

***"Look Ahead's support has been invaluable, and I'm excited about the future".***

**£20  
HIGH STREET  
VOUCHER**

We want to hear your story.  
If we publish it, we will give you a £20 voucher.

Send your story to:

**gettinginvolved@lookahead.org.uk**

## Get involved in choosing new staff!

To staff it's a workplace, to us it's our home. We know who we want to work with us and who will be a good fit. Getting involved in recruitment means helping choose the right people - those who earn our trust and make us feel comfortable. It's also a confidence boost and can help in future interviews by giving you an understanding of what the other side are looking for.

There are lots of ways to take part:

- write your own interview questions,
- join an interview panel,
- or even have an informal meet and greet over a cup of tea or coffee.

Together, we can make sure that Look Ahead hire the right people with the right values. Look Ahead customers also help to recruit members of our board, not just staff.



**Jo Ellis**, Board Member: "I was offered board roles at three organisations, but Look Ahead stood out. Why? Because you, the tenants, were involved. That showed me that Look Ahead doesn't just talk about values - it puts them into action."

Interested? Email: [gettinginvolved@lookahead.org.uk](mailto:gettinginvolved@lookahead.org.uk) or speak to your support worker or housing officer - you've got nothing to lose and everything to gain.

# MEET NICOLE,

LOOK AHEAD'S EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR OF GROUP OPERATIONS  
AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE



Heads-Up's dynamic duo **Sharron** and **John** interviewed Look Ahead's Executive Director of Group Operations and Customer Experience, **Nicole Njie**, to find out more about her work and how she supports customers. Here is a summary of their interview:

## **SHARRON: WELCOME NICOLE, CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND HOW YOUR CAREER LED YOU HERE?**

**NICOLE:** I've been here for eight years and have enjoyed the journey so far. I started my career as a support worker. My cousin's cerebral palsy inspired me to pursue social work. Over the years, I've supported people with physical disabilities, mental health needs, and those reintegrating from prison. I joined Look Ahead to make a difference.

## **JOHN: HI, NICOLE. THANK YOU FOR DOING THIS. COULD YOU TELL US HOW YOU FOUND THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING INTERVIEWED BY A CUSTOMER PANEL?**

**NICOLE:** I think it's brilliant. Customers get asked questions during assessments, referrals. You tell your story again, and again. So, I think it's good for

you to have the opportunity to interview staff and understand what motivates us.

## **SHARRON: WHAT MOTIVATES YOU AT WORK?**

**NICOLE:** I want to make sure we give really great services for our customers that support them to live the best lives. When you see that impact and the outcomes, you feel really proud to do what you're doing.

## **JOHN: DO YOU LIKE YOUR JOB?**

**NICOLE:** I love my job. I love to see customers grow. I also love seeing staff and colleagues grow and develop and do different things. There's never a dull moment.

## **SHARRON: WHAT DOES A DAY LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?**

**NICOLE:** In the morning, I go to the gym, I love boxing and training. Then I go home and get ready for work. There's the

usual stuff, meetings, emails. Sometimes I go to services and meet customers. I often write reports and think about what Look Ahead needs to do. I speak to the team about ideas and plans and how we are making these happen. After work I love cooking and spending time with my family.

## ***So, what do you both like about Look Ahead?***

**SHARRON:** What I like about Look Ahead is all the staff team here, the people are very nice and welcoming.

**JOHN:** For me it's how I've been welcomed and supported on my journey, and the confidence it's given me.

**If you enjoyed this interview, you can scan this QR code for a recording of the full interview.**



# A FESTIVE ROUNDUP



Over the festive season, Look Ahead worked with partners to provide a range of enjoyable activities and gifts for customers.



AnyBODY Can Dance project.

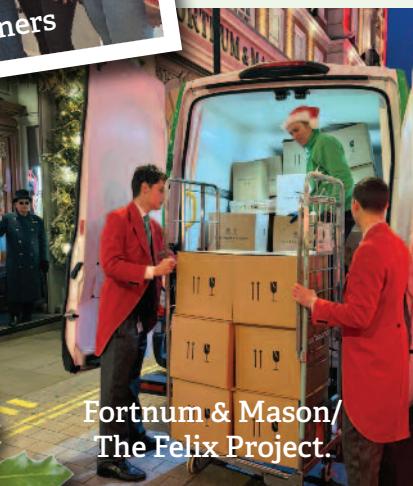
Thanks to the incredible efforts of our staff, supporters, and corporate partners, Look Ahead raised over **£20,000** for our 2025 "Make Someone's Christmas Brighter" campaign. These generous contributions paid for Christmas celebrations across our services and gift vouchers for young people under 18 and families, ensuring that over 300 children received a gift.

Some other highlights and activities were:

- Over 15 dedicated staff members raised **£4,000** through the sponsored **Santa in the City Run**.
- A generous donation of Christmas food from **Fortnum & Mason** and **Daylesford Organic**, arranged through our partners at **The Felix Project**.
- An end of year party for participants in our **Any BODY Can Dance project**.
- **Barclays partners** volunteered at our Warwick Road service, decorating and setting up for the Christmas party.
- Gifts donated by partners at **Avison Young and UFM**.
- Warm winter coats donated by **WrapUp London**.



Avison Young and UFM



Fortnum & Mason/  
The Felix Project.



Santa in the City Run

**THANK YOU**  
to everyone who  
made this possible.

Your kindness and generosity  
have truly made a difference  
the festive season.

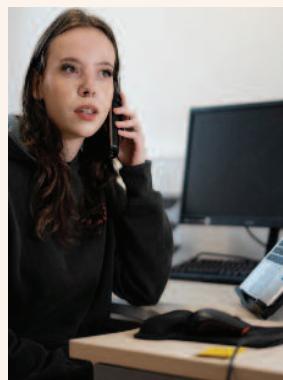
# PANEL UPDATES

Here's what your customer panels have been working on lately!

## Tenant and Landlord Panel:

In October we talked about making it easier for you to raise complaints. We're doing this by training staff and making sure that we use clearer language. You asked for more visibility from senior staff and clearer action on antisocial behaviour which we are working on.

## Customer Incident Panel:



Our last meeting focused on incidents of domestic abuse. The panel shared ideas for helping people feel safer, like workshops, leaflets, and videos, and discussed how staff can better support anyone experiencing domestic abuse.

## Boss Builders:

We're reviewing support plans to make sure they're truly about you - your goals, your achievements, and your voice. Our feedback is helping to change how support plans look, work and feel.

## Policy Stars:

We've started a new group where you can help make our rules and ways of working fairer and easier to understand for everyone. **We're looking for new members, we'd love you to join!**

**Interested?** Email us on [gettinginvolved@lookahead.org.uk](mailto:gettinginvolved@lookahead.org.uk)

## John's recipe for simple, tasty Ragu



### Ingredients

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil  
1 medium onion, chopped  
4 cloves garlic, finely chopped  
500g beef mince (or a vegetarian / vegan alternative)  
1 (6 oz.) can tomato puree  
2 (28 oz.) cans chopped tomatoes  
1 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon ground pepper  
2 teaspoons dried oregano  
2 teaspoons dried basil  
1 teaspoon dried thyme  
2 bay leaves

### Instructions

Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add onion and garlic; cook, stirring frequently, for 5 to 6 minutes, or until the onion is soft. Add beef mince and cook until all the beef has browned. Add tomato paste; cook, stirring constantly, for 1 minute. Add chopped tomatoes, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, stirring frequently. Reduce heat to a simmer, stirring occasionally for 50 minutes. Add dried oregano, basil and thyme, and let it simmer for 5 minutes. This will make four portions. To batch cook eight portions just double the quantities.

**This recipe can be easily changed to suit your tastes. To turn this into a curry sauce add curry powder, or to make chilli, add a tin of red kidney beans and chilli powder.**

# NOTICE BOARD

## Cost of living advice and support

If you are struggling with the cost of living, you may be able to get more support.

## WHAT AWAAB'S LAW MEANS FOR YOU

Awaab's Law is a new rule that affects how landlords support tenants when there is damp, mould, or other serious hazards in their home.

### What you need to do:

Your landlord can support you better when you report problems in your home. If you find damp, mould, or another serious hazard in your home, please report it straight away.

If Look Ahead is your landlord or property manager, you can report a problem by:

- Calling our Customer Contact Centre on **0333 010 4600**.
- Emailing the team on: [repairs@lookahead.org.uk](mailto:repairs@lookahead.org.uk)
- Speaking to your support worker or housing officer.
- To find the form, **scan this QR code** with your smart phone camera or go to our website at: [lookahead.org.uk/customer-hub/repairs-and-maintenance/](http://lookahead.org.uk/customer-hub/repairs-and-maintenance/)



Customers from Look Ahead's Barnsley Street Neighbourhood Mental Health Centre want you to know that good smells can improve the way you feel.

### For example:

- Lavender-scented heat packs can help you feel comfortable and relaxed.
- Citrus smells can help you unwind. You can make your own citrus scent by peeling an orange, drying the skin in the oven and putting it in a jar to enjoy at any time.

You should also tell us about you, for example if you have a disability, or a condition that affects your mental or physical health, such as asthma, anxiety or low income.

If we are not your landlord or property manager, contact your landlord or property manager. If you are not sure who to contact, speak to your support worker or housing officer.

### What your landlord must do:

- Investigate the problem within 10 working days.
- Tell you what has been found within three working days of the investigation unless the issue has already been resolved beforehand.
- Make sure your home is made safe within 5 working days, or within 24 hours in an emergency, if a serious health risk is found.
- Offer you somewhere else to stay if your home can't be made safe in time.
- Make sure you know what is happening all the time.

## SAMARITANS

Winter is a difficult time for lots of people. If you need someone to talk to, you can call Samaritans for free at any time day or night on

**116 123**

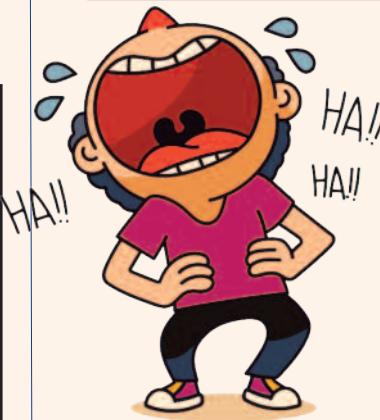
# FUN & GAMES

## SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

6 in all



## A JOKE FOR YOU



**Question:** Why was Cinderella bad at rugby?

**Answer:** She kept running away from the ball!

## QUIZ QUESTION



How many bones does a shark have?

(Answer at the bottom of the page)



**Get involved at Look Ahead:**

[getinvolved@lookahead.org.uk](mailto:getinvolved@lookahead.org.uk)

**Email Look Ahead:** [getintouch@lookahead.org.uk](mailto:getintouch@lookahead.org.uk)

**Call Look Ahead:** 0333 010 4600

**Look Ahead, Cally Yard,**  
439 Caledonian Road, London, N7 9BG.

[lookahead.org.uk](http://lookahead.org.uk)



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