



Raising Stroke Awareness
across Wigan & Leigh

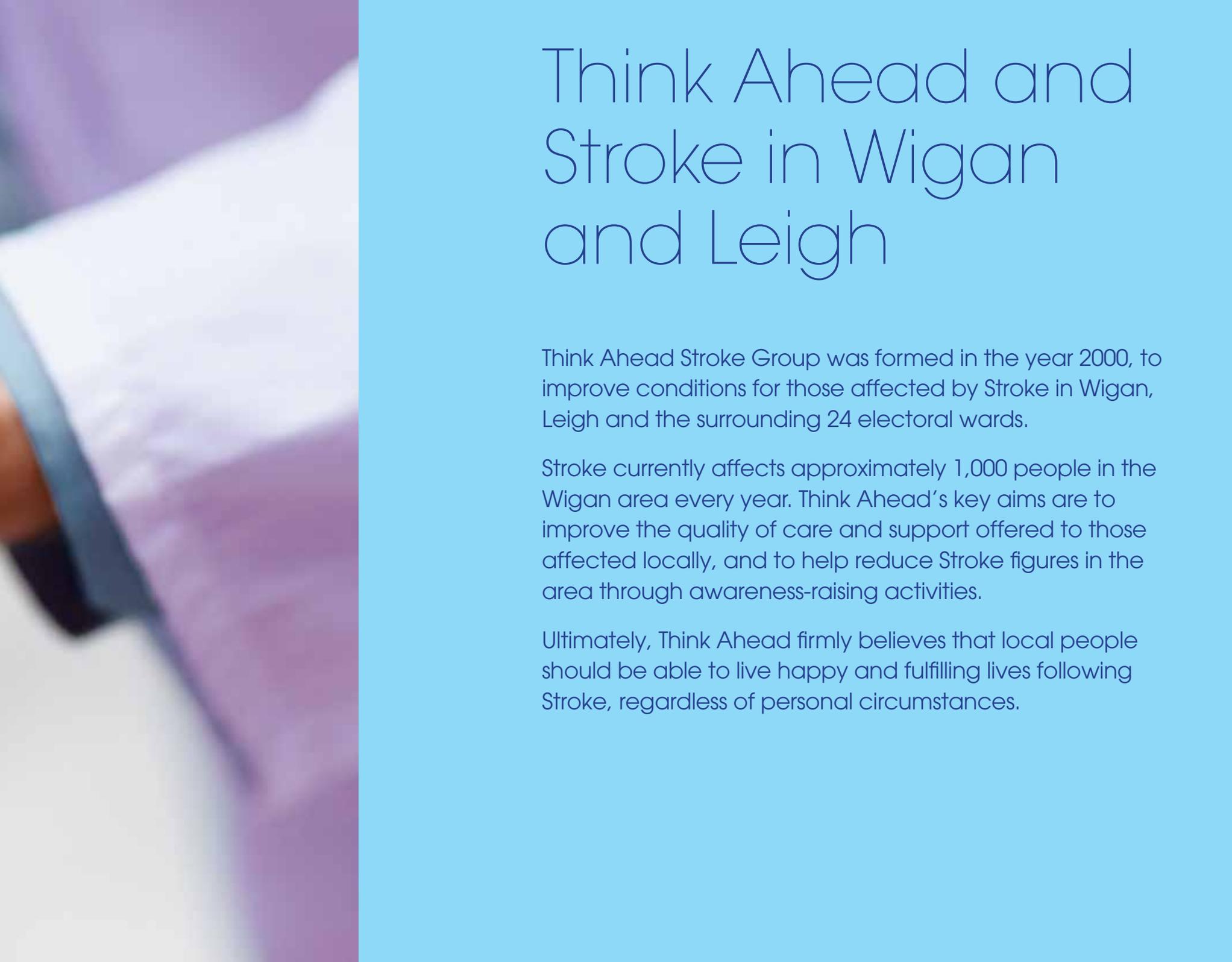


WORKING TOGETHER
RAISING STROKE AWARENESS
Annual Review 2011-12



A Stroke happens when the blood supply to the brain is cut off and brain cells are damaged or die, often leading to physical and mental impairments.

Although significant recovery within the first month is common, most Stroke Survivors will have to deal with long-term problems.



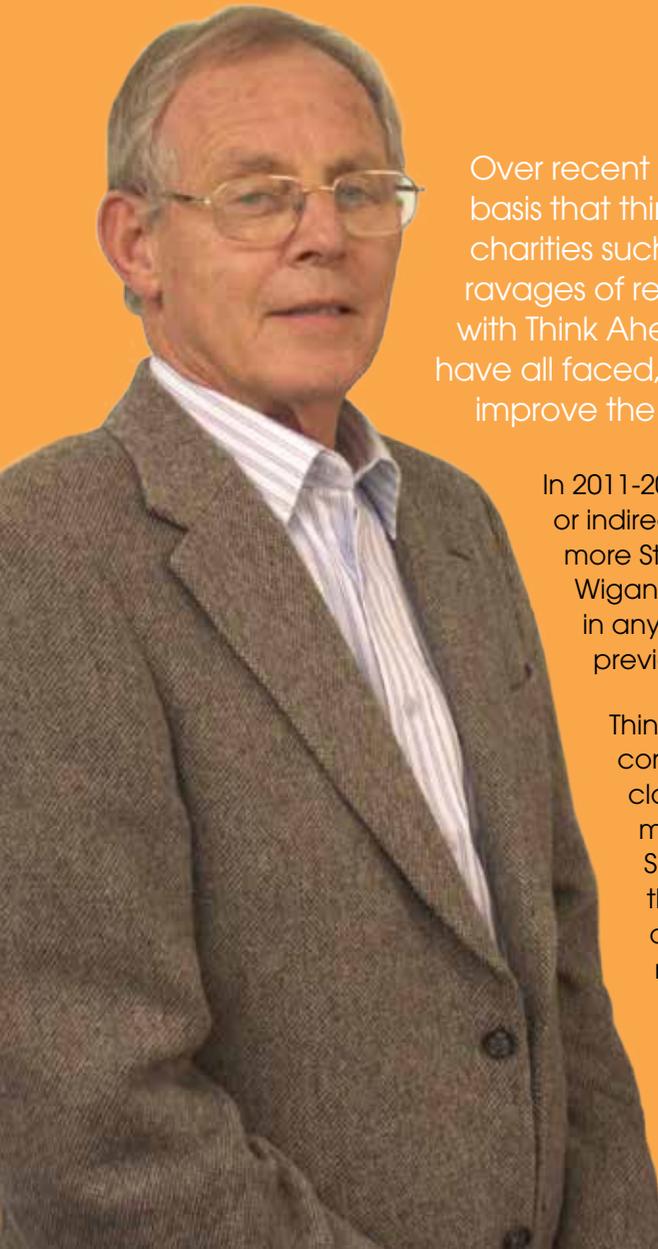
Think Ahead and Stroke in Wigan and Leigh

Think Ahead Stroke Group was formed in the year 2000, to improve conditions for those affected by Stroke in Wigan, Leigh and the surrounding 24 electoral wards.

Stroke currently affects approximately 1,000 people in the Wigan area every year. Think Ahead's key aims are to improve the quality of care and support offered to those affected locally, and to help reduce Stroke figures in the area through awareness-raising activities.

Ultimately, Think Ahead firmly believes that local people should be able to live happy and fulfilling lives following Stroke, regardless of personal circumstances.

Our Chairman on a year of progress



Over recent years we have been reminded on an almost daily basis that things have been tough, and small, locally based charities such as ours have been particularly vulnerable to the ravages of recession. But it is testament to everyone involved with Think Ahead Stroke Group that, despite the challenges we have all faced, we continue to make great progress and strive to improve the lives of Stroke Survivors and their carers

In 2011-2012 we directly or indirectly helped more Stroke Survivors in Wigan and Leigh than in any of the charity's previous 11 years.

Think Ahead continues to work closely with its members: Stroke Survivors and their families and carers, restoring hope and dignity for people often lost in the darkness of despair.

Our membership has risen to a new high of 450, with Think Ahead filling thousands of places for its various organised clubs, groups, respite programmes and social activities. These front line support services are the charity's lifeblood - and their range and quality are better than ever.

Further to this Think Ahead is now placing a greater emphasis on using its experience and knowledge to shape and influence the quality and direction of local Stroke care.

The charity now chairs a committee that includes Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Foundation Trust, Bridgewater Community Healthcare Trust, Wigan Council - Adult services, Wigan and Leigh Housing and Wigan Leisure Trust's Active Living Team.

Our aim is to shape a social care pathway that sits alongside its medical care equivalent - ensuring that Stroke and the issue of better self-care for Stroke Survivors and carers stays high on the local agenda.

This is a crucial undertaking for Think Ahead, because it is only through passing on the experiences of our hundreds of members that we can continue to play a massive role in improving the lives of thousands of people across our community.

Finally, I urge you all to read the stories submitted by our members in this report - and I challenge you not to be moved by their bravery and optimism.

Thank you to everyone who works so hard to ensure that Think Ahead continues to play such a vital role in our community, and here's to another successful year. Mike Aspinall

Our unique services

Think Ahead Stroke Group's mission is to provide advice, information and support to anyone affected by Stroke in the community of Wigan, Leigh and the surrounding area. Whether a Stroke Survivor, a carer or family member, Think Ahead offers experienced assistance for as long it is needed.



The aftermath of a Stroke often leads to a great deal of frustration. Losing skills and abilities that were once natural is hard enough to take, but when communication/disability/memory loss becomes a challenge, Stroke Survivors can be left feeling isolated.

That's why Think Ahead developed the Stroke Support Service. All Stroke Supporters have direct experience of Stroke so they know how to help. This can cover a wide range of health and social care topics or just lending a listening ear.

Our Stroke Supporter, Paul Newton, is one of the first points of contact for many Stroke Survivors and carers in the local area. Paul pays weekly visits to the Acute Stroke Unit at Royal Albert Edward Infirmary, Stroke rehabilitation beds at Alexandra Court and also visits Stroke Survivors and Carers out in the local community, to advise people on their first steps towards rehabilitation.

Think Ahead is able to offer a continuous network of support through its long-term Living with Stroke programme. This includes regular meetings with other group members and a wealth of suitable social activities to help with the rehabilitation process.

Some examples of our activities include:

- Art classes
- IT courses
- Card-making workshops
- Photography classes
- Pottery workshops
- Spanish classes
- Group holidays

The Executive Manager on our best ever year

This year, despite the financial challenges, Think Ahead has improved its services for those who experience Stroke in the local community.

One of our proudest achievements this year has come in establishing the Stroke Care Pathway, a Think Ahead initiative that brings together the Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh (WWL) NHS Foundation Trust, Bridgewater Community Healthcare Trust, Wigan MBC Adult Services, Wigan and Leigh Housing and Wigan Leisure Trust's Active Living Team.

The Stroke Care Pathway provides a continuous programme of support for Stroke Survivors, ensuring that they receive the best care and advice to aid recovery. Through regular reviews of the services being offered in hospitals, rehabilitation centres and ultimately back home, Think Ahead is able to guide Stroke care and awareness across the Borough.

Our Stroke Support Service now accommodates many new Stroke Survivors and Carers from the local community, who receive support, information, advice and friendship. In September we welcomed our first

Stroke Supporter; Paul Newton, whose enthusiasm following first-hand experience of Stroke makes him an ideal ambassador for Think Ahead's services in the community.

Thanks to Stroke Survivors and volunteers in the local area, we have been able to increase the activities that we offer our members to include floristry lessons, Spanish language classes and many more. Our Working Groups ensure that there are rehabilitative skills on offer for all.

To help local Carers, a Working Group now meets monthly to share valuable information with all our associated Carers across the Borough, via our Newsletter. A dedicated Carers group also meets monthly, alongside other group meetings at our St Peter's Pavilion base.

Our monthly group outing on the East Lancashire Railway in May was a great success, providing a memorable experience for 62 of our members. We look forward to offering more valuable outings in the future, with a focus on

making them suitable, accessible and (perhaps most importantly) fun for everyone in the group.

This year, it has been rewarding to see the progress that so many of our members have made, and immensely satisfying that they now play an active role in steering many of the services we offer.

We look forward to achieving so much more in the coming years.

Carol Sankey



Paul Newton, 45, Astley

Looking back, things were probably going too well.



My wife and I had just bought a bigger house because our second child was due very soon. I had an interview for a better job coming up and we were putting the finishing touches to our family holiday plans.

Out of the blue, I found myself in hospital with a heart infection which led to part of a valve breaking off and blocking the bloodflow to my brain. I suffered a major Stroke at the age of 33.

I was still in hospital when my wife gave birth to our daughter – at least it wasn't a long journey down to the maternity ward!

Four months later, I was well enough to return home, but that's when a lot of the problems started. For my wife, it was like having another baby around the house. I suffered from all of the 'typical' symptoms of Stroke, problems with my vision, speech, hearing and mobility.

After living an active life and driving almost the length of the country for my job, suddenly I wasn't allowed to walk to the end of the street without help!

I heard about Think Ahead Stroke Group through the Active Living Team, when I was trying to get back on my feet and learning some skills again. Although I was by far the youngest person there and quite self-conscious, I quickly found that I was meeting lots of new people and relearning the social skills that I thought I'd lost for good.

After five years of support from Think Ahead, I was delighted to be able to return to full-time work. As soon as I could manage it, I started volunteering with the charity to give something back – I knew that my experiences could benefit other people who had been through similar things.

I'm now proud to be Think Ahead's first full-time Stroke Supporter. It's my job to help anyone affected by Stroke to get in touch with essential services and information, but also simply to listen.

The best thing in my recovery was sharing my problems with people who understood what I was going through, and Think Ahead understands Stroke better than anyone else.

Out and About

Think Ahead Stroke Group's public events and activities are crucial in establishing and maintaining awareness of Stroke locally.



May's 2011 Charity Challenge was a free community sporting event to increase local awareness of Stroke and encourage active lifestyles. The event played on the friendly rivalry between two local towns by pitching Wigan and Leigh against each other, in a range of activities for all ages and abilities. Activities included hand-biking, 5-a-side football, 'Pass-the-Pasty' and a fun run.



To promote the Charity Challenge through the local media, Think Ahead drew on the historical division between Wigan and Leigh during the English Civil War. Enrolling local junior sports teams, Think Ahead staged a 're-enactment' of the famous Battle of Wigan Lane, using wet sponges as ammunition and a local canal towpath as the battlefield. The media event was a great advert for the Charity Challenge, gaining coverage on local radio and in the print media.



In September, Think Ahead staged its first Charity Dragon Boat Race Day at Scotsman's Flash, Wigan. The event strengthened bonds with the local business community, raising awareness of Stroke and emphasising the benefits of exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle.

In October, Think Ahead teamed up with Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust's Active Living Team to organise a series of sponsored group walks in the countryside around Wigan and Leigh. Walking was identified as a suitable form of light exercise for older people, or those who have experienced injury or illness. The walks raised £842 in sponsorship for Think Ahead and were met with enthusiasm from regular walkers in the Active Living group.



For National Stroke Awareness Day in May, Think Ahead went out into Wigan and Leigh with the 'Feel Well Truck', an adapted mobile facility offering free blood pressure checks and health information to the public. Think Ahead were joined by two NHS nurses, the local Smoking Cessation Team, health trainers and the Active Living team, raising awareness of Stroke and ways to prevent it.





Marlene Stockley, Pemberton

11 years ago, everything had seemed so simple. My husband, Derek, was working at Great Universal Stores in Wigan and was only a couple of years from a well-earned retirement.

We were visiting Blackpool for a bank holiday weekend when Derek very suddenly took ill. He was rushed to the local Hospital where we were told he had had a Stroke. Derek was cared for marvellously by the doctors and nurses in Blackpool before being transferred to Whelley in Wigan.

It was when he came home that the problems really started for us and the whole family. We just thought "What now?". We hadn't had any information from anyone about what to do next or how to help recovery.

Derek was finding it especially difficult to talk, so we looked into finding a speech therapist at Wigan's Sunshine House. We happened to visit on a day when Think Ahead Stroke Group was holding one of their first meetings and we were kindly invited to join in.

Derek was frustrated at first because his speech problems meant he couldn't

communicate as well as he wanted to, but spending time with other Stroke Survivors who knew what he was going through, really brought Derek out of his shell.

We thought that our social lives might be at an end when Derek had his Stroke, but he's done so much through the Group like going on respite breaks and learning new skills. Think Ahead have helped us to face the changes in our life with confidence and even excitement.

When I saw how much good the group was doing in the community, I decided to help with their fundraising, and before I knew it, I became a trustee of the Group. Fundraising is one of the hardest challenges for Think Ahead. Lots of people donate to the more popular charities, but Stroke doesn't seem to come into the people's minds, even though so many people are affected by it.

I hope that Think Ahead is able to help more people like my Derek. Without them there would be so many people suffering in silence around Wigan and Leigh.

Awareness Raising Activities

As an awareness-raising charity, Think Ahead Stroke Group has increasingly valued the importance of regular online, print and broadcast media exposure in the local area.

To guarantee its sustained public profile, Think Ahead has continued to work with media relations specialists Frontier PR, whose engagement with local community stakeholders has been a valuable service since 2009.

In the last year, Think Ahead has featured 25 times in the Wigan and Leigh printed media, enabling us to maintain our profile and keep Stroke in the public arena. Our approximate 593 column inches in the local media has served to frequently remind people who we are, the importance of what we do and how best to access our services.

This year has also seen the advancement of our social media offering, across twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn platforms.

Our Twitter page has become an essential communications tool, offering instant connection with a following of almost 600 companies and individuals in the local area and beyond.

Think Ahead's Facebook page provides an easily accessible portal for updates on our events programme, photography and media coverage, as well as offering a practical feedback mechanism. The page has generated 106 'likes' in the last year.

Through LinkedIn, Think Ahead has been able to improve its connection with professionals and businesses in the local area, boosting our profile and establishing useful links for future public activities in the area. Think Ahead has made 200 'connections' through LinkedIn over the last 12 months.



DRAGONS LINE UP FOR RACE...



GET ROWING: Activities co-ordinator Val Benikowski and support administrator Linda Monaghan (right) are pictured with the Adia team

BY NATALIE WALKER

A STROKE charity is looking for teams to enter its dragon boat championship competition this month.

Think Ahead stroke group is organising the fun boating event at Seacombe's Fresh Water Activity Centre, off Froswick Lane, in Wigan, on Friday, September 16 and is urging businesses from across the borough to enter teams of 18 to take part.

The charity is aiming to gather 12 teams for the event, with each team racing at least three times in heats, before a knockout phase will decide the ultimate winners.

Prizes will be awarded for first, second and third place crews and the winning group will be crowned 2011 Think Ahead Charity Dragon Boat Champions.

Alongside the racing, there will be a host of fun activities on the shoreline to entertain spectators, plus a live barbecue. Representatives from Think Ahead will be on hand to provide information and advice about active lifestyles, which can help prevent a stroke.

One of the teams already signed up come from Adia's Wigan distribution centre.

Maura Morris, of Adia's Wigan distribution centre, said: "We're all really excited about the Think Ahead Dragon Boat Race in September. It looks like it'll be a fantastic afternoon and we're always looking for ways to help local charities while doing something fun."

Clare Sankey, charity administrator for Think Ahead Stroke Group, said: "We'll have more businesses to sign up and get involved. Approximately 1,000 people across Wigan and Leigh are affected by a stroke every year. But by making sensible life choices, the risk of stroke could be reduced by 50 per cent."

"We hope that by getting involved in sporting activities like this people in the borough will think more about their health and make the most of the opportunities available on our doorstep."

For prices and information on Think Ahead's Corporate Dragon Boat Race, please visit www.think-ahead.org.uk/central/CorporateDragonBoatRace or call 01696.



Dave Winstanley, 61, Atherton

As a welder by trade I'd worked all over the world – from the freezing cold of Norway and the North Sea, to welding oil pipes in the scorching heat of the Nubian Desert in The Sudan, East Africa.

I was a strong 53 year old when I had my stroke in 2004, and although I'd been feeling a bit tired, there were no real warning signs of what was about to happen.

It was a normal, boring Sunday afternoon, I was at home and I remember thinking about going down the local to meet a mate for a pint or two – when it hit me. After that I can't remember a thing. A total blank!

I awoke in hospital and was simply terrified at what I had become. I felt like a vegetable mentally and physically –

I genuinely thought they'd put me in a psychiatric hospital things were so bad, I couldn't think straight or make simple everyday decisions.

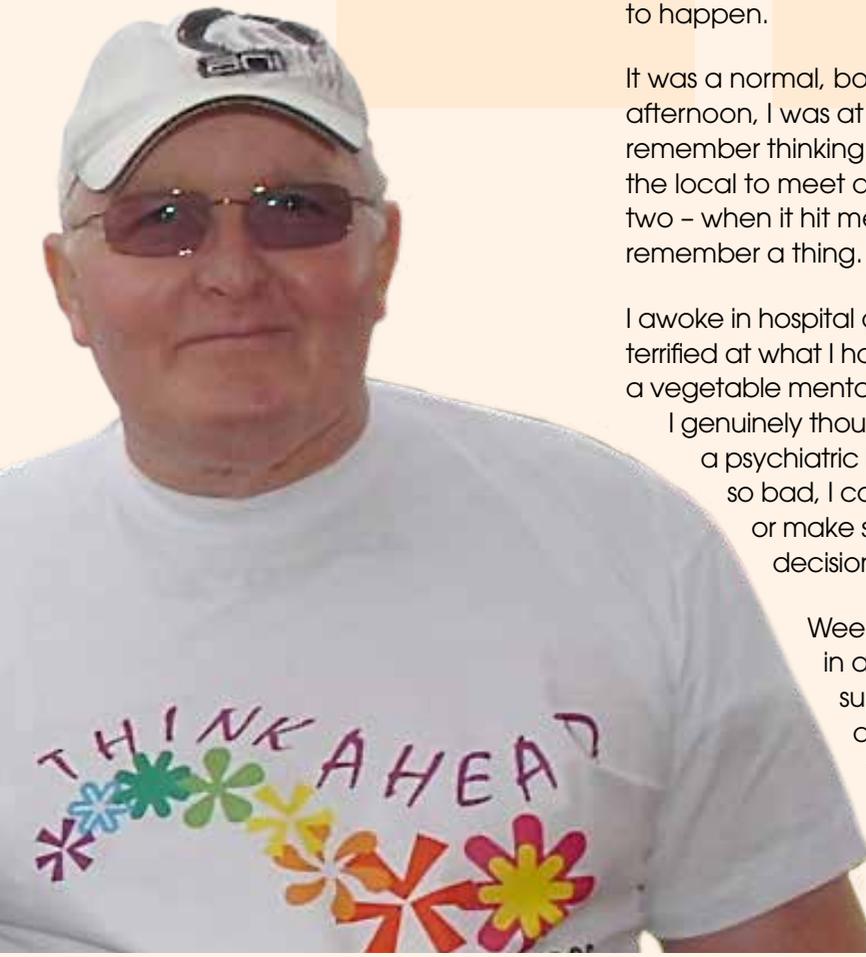
Weeks later I left hospital in a wheelchair. But I suppose I'm a fighter at heart, because I was determined to get out of the thing, and it took me a year to do it.

Being part of Think Ahead Stroke Group made me feel part of the 'normal world' again. It was one of the group's regular trips to a local restaurant that was my first real evening out.

It's funny, because even through Think Ahead is a charity and support group for Stroke survivors, it's the one place where I feel my stroke is irrelevant.

That might sound strange to people on the outside, but because we're all in the same boat I just relax and forget about it. I don't feel embarrassed because I need a hand to do up a coat or struggle to cut up my food.

Eight years later I'm now 61, and Think Ahead is still a huge part of my life. I'm taking computer classes, and last Christmas took a role in our very first pantomime as an Ugly Sister in Cinderella, which was great for me as I love to act the fool and make people laugh.



Numbers worth shouting about

450

Think Ahead Stroke Group's membership, an increase of 10% on last year.

605

Total number of places taken on our organised respite breaks.

1,421

Living with Stroke places taken up across the last year

593

Approximate column inches generated this year in the Wigan Evening Post, Wigan Observer, Leigh Reporter and Leigh Journal.

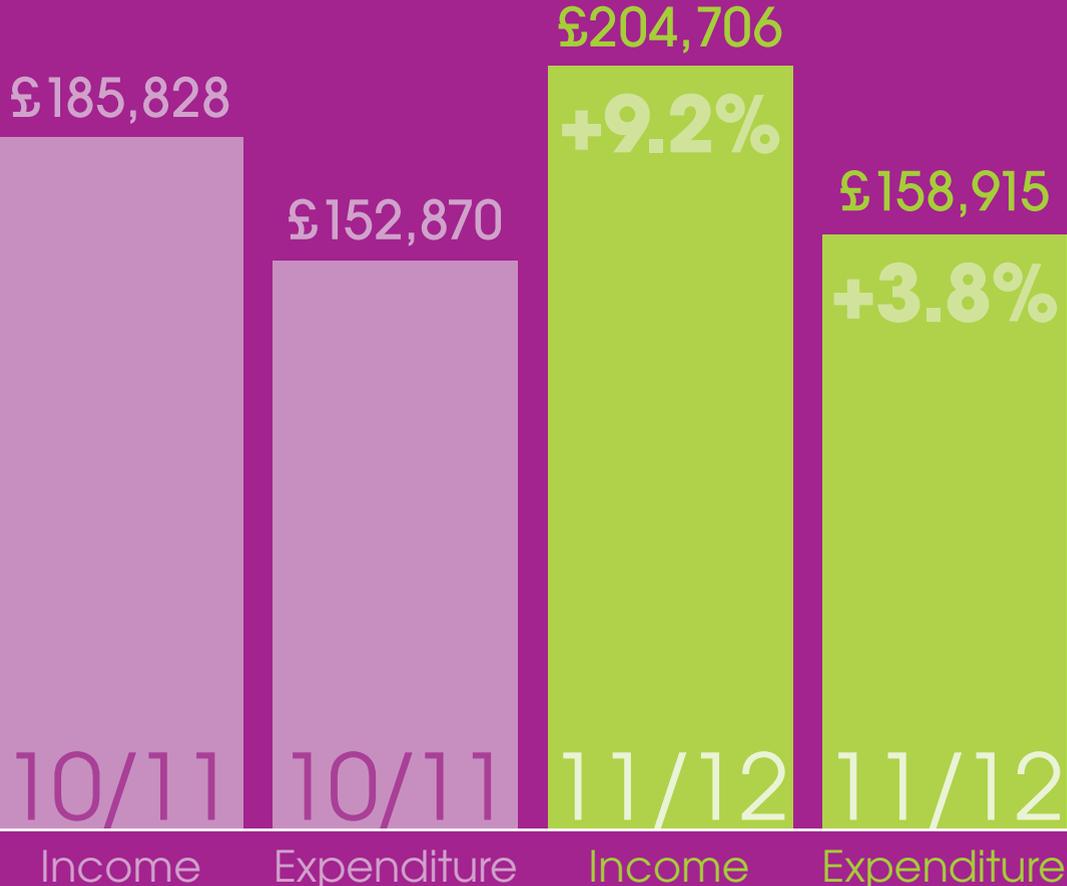
265

Members' households who now receive our newsletter, packed full of news updates, information and advice.

748

Estimated total attendance at our monthly Living with Stroke meetings (Average 68 per month)

Our Financial Headlines



Reserves Policy / Risk Analysis

Think Ahead's clear financial strategy is regularly reviewed by our Board of Trustees to ensure that risks are managed to serve our beneficiaries needs and, therefore, ensure that our Charity continues to reach its set goals.

Through clear governance and monitoring it is evident that our main sources of income will substantially reduce from 2013 and this could have a dramatic effect on essential services to our beneficiaries.

Our Reserves Policy reflects a poor economic climate and major internal reorganisation in local services and, therefore, asks for a minimum of 12 months operating costs be made available to ensure solvency and continuation of the Charity's business in the event of unforeseen difficulty.



Mick Doherty, 39, Hindley

When I lined up for the Great Manchester 10K Run on May 20th, I was mostly thinking about my main reason for racing: my mum Joyce and her incredible 12-month journey.

A year ago, Mum was living in Aspull, working part-time as a cleaner, and living a pretty normal life. Then everything changed.

Her initial symptom was high blood pressure, but as it persisted the doctors became increasingly concerned. One day Mum told me that she was feeling unwell, and after a trip to hospital we were shocked to discover she'd experienced a series of small Strokes.

The side effects came quickly. Her eyesight quickly deteriorated, leaving her without half her field of vision – with the remaining half in a foggy haze.

But what proved most damaging to Mum was the psychological impact. Her self confidence drained away overnight, as she was forced to give up work and rely more on family for day to day support. Just simple things like getting around or nipping down the shops became impossible without assistance.

Mum and the family were at a real low-point, when we discovered Think Ahead Stroke Group.

They knew exactly what we were going through and set about helping Mum get her life back, and things started to slowly improve. Suddenly Mum was making new friends and enjoying new experiences.

Suddenly Mum was doing things and going places that she hadn't done even before her stroke. All because Think Ahead and her new friends gave her the confidence to be a bit more adventurous.

A year on and things have improved beyond recognition. Yes it's still a challenge, but nothing like it was – and Mum's vision has even started to improve a bit.

So, on May 20th I was pounding the streets of Manchester, safe in the knowledge that no matter what time I achieved or how tired I was at the end, I'd have raised a few quid and given something back to those who have helped turn not just Mum's life around, but the whole family's.



What's Next?

Think Ahead Stroke Group is determined to respond to the needs of Stroke Survivors and Carers across Wigan and Leigh, improving our services over the coming years.

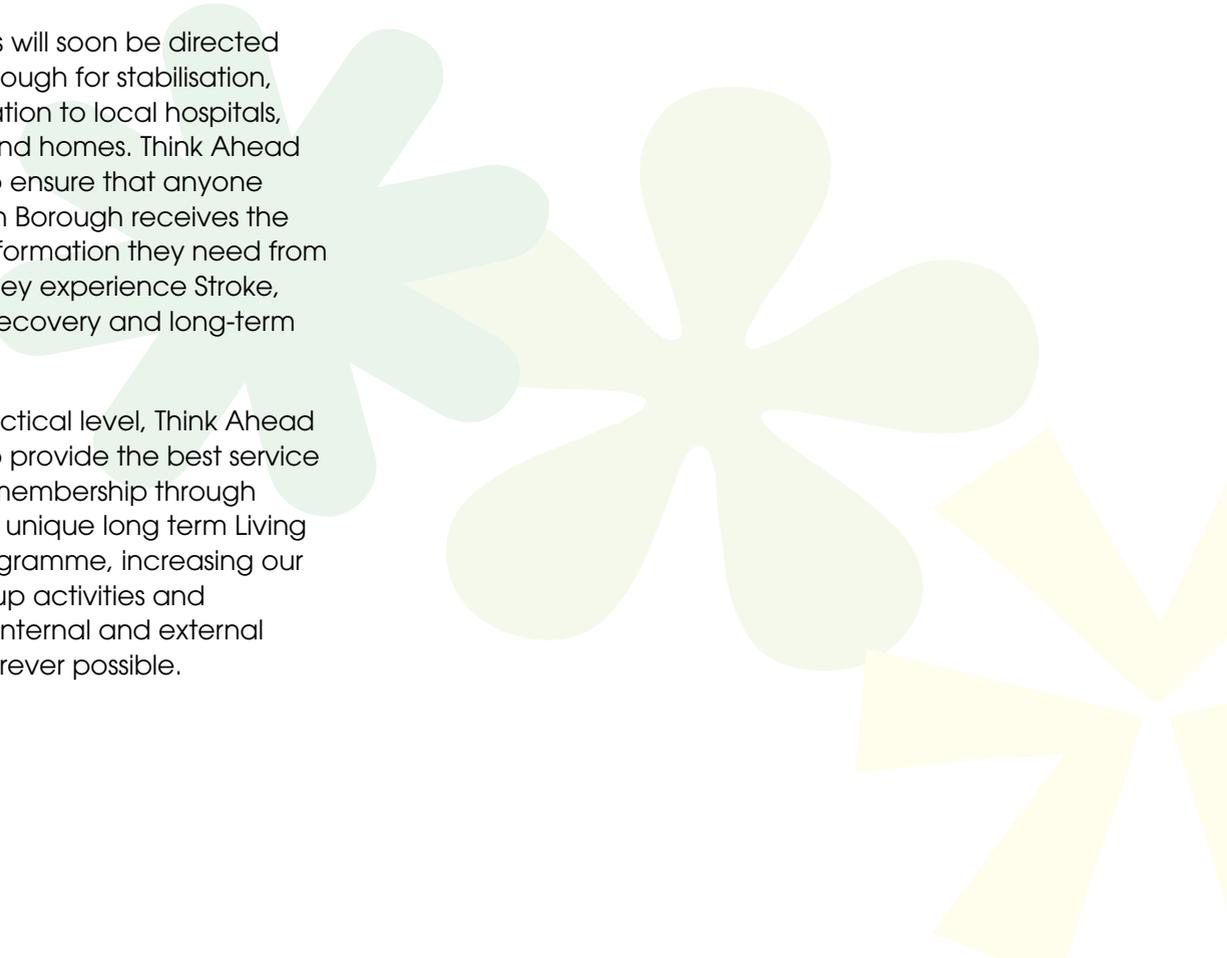
As with many charities, the main challenge we face will be financial, with any reduction in our allocation from the Big Lottery Fund likely to affect us greatly. Think Ahead's board of trustees will be tasked with making up the shortfall in money from alternative sources.

At a local level, all of the local statutory organisations involved in Stroke care are facing major internal reorganisation, including Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council's Adult Services, the Primary Care Trust and the Clinical Commissioning Group. Our strong working relationship with local partners via the Stroke Care Pathway positions us ideally to respond to any changes effectively.

Salford's Hope Hospital is set to become a Centre of Excellence for the Greater Manchester region, meaning that

all Stroke cases will soon be directed outside the Borough for stabilisation, before repatriation to local hospitals, care centres and homes. Think Ahead will continue to ensure that anyone from the Wigan Borough receives the support and information they need from the moment they experience Stroke, through early recovery and long-term rehabilitation.

On a more practical level, Think Ahead will continue to provide the best service to its growing membership through enhancing our unique long term Living with Stroke Programme, increasing our offering of group activities and responding to internal and external feedback wherever possible.



Thank You Wigan and Leigh

Think Ahead's vital work in the local area would be impossible without the assistance and generosity of numerous public and professional bodies.

Firstly, thanks to all the registered members who make up Think Ahead Stroke Group. Our 450-strong membership gives us great insight into the needs of local people affected by Stroke, helping us to improve the services we can offer in the long term.

We would also like to thank all the people who volunteer their time for Think Ahead including carers, activity tutors, event participants, Stroke Supporters and, of course, our dedicated team of staff.

Think Ahead's trustees (all Stroke Survivors or Carers) also give up their own time, to help steer the charity towards its long term goals. Their objective view is always greatly appreciated.

To all our partners in the local health and social care communities, including our colleagues working on improving the Stroke Care Pathway, we offer our thanks and continued support. These include:

- Wigan Primary Care Trust
- Wigan Borough Council Adult Services
- Wigan Leisure Trust's Active Living Team
- Wrightington, Wigan & Leigh NHS Foundation Trust
- Bridgewater Community Healthcare Trust
- Wigan and Leigh Housing.

Of course, without vital funding, Think Ahead would not be able to operate day to day. We are extremely grateful and fortunate to have received the support of the Big Lottery Fund and the Lloyds TSB Foundation Trust, amongst others.

Finally, for their continued support of local charitable causes and community initiatives, the local print and broadcast media, including the Wigan Evening Post, Leigh Reporter, Leigh Journal and 102.4 Wish FM.

We look forward to working with all of you in the coming years to ensure that those affected by Stroke in the local community receive the best information, advice, friendship and support possible.





Nicola Cornthwaite, 45, Hindley Green

I couldn't believe it when the doctor told me that I'd had a Stroke at the age of 42. As a community nurse, I used to see older people who had had Strokes all the time, but never anyone of my age!

I had been at Bolton Hospital, waiting to start a work shift when I started to feel unwell. My leg and arm on one side began to feel heavy and then my throat started tightening. I tried walking to the bathroom but my balance had gone, I staggered like I was drunk and talking took a lot of effort.

Despite being a nurse and having nurses all around me, no-one recognised the signs of Stroke at first. The strange thing is that the last thing I heard before getting out of the car that morning was the NHS FAST advert on the radio!

The staff at Bolton Stroke unit were fantastic, but when I was sent home, I wasn't ready for the psychological after-effects of the Stroke. I live in Hindley Green, quite a remote part of the Borough, and because I couldn't drive any more, I became more and more isolated.

I've always been a really sociable person, so it was a real shock to the system.

I found out about Think Ahead after searching for 'Stroke Wigan and Leigh' on the internet. Once I had their number, it took a few attempts to go through with a call because I was so nervous about stepping into the unknown. I just wish I'd got in touch sooner.

It was such a relief to talk to someone who had had similar experiences, and although I was the youngest person in the group at the time, I was made to feel so welcome. I tried to be the 'helper' in the group whenever we went on excursions, which motivated me to get back into a work routine and mindset.

11 months after my Stroke, I was able to return to my old job and it felt great. I don't think I would have been able to do it without the support I got from Think Ahead and all the members.

My Stroke put so much of my life into perspective and I'm glad of each day now...

Getting Involved

Think Ahead Stroke Group's doors are always open to new members who have experience of Stroke, either as a survivor, carer or loved one. Stroke can happen to anyone, at any age and at any time; whatever your circumstances, Think Ahead is here to help.

In these testing financial times, we rely even more on the generosity of donors to support our vital community work. If you would like to make a financial contribution towards our continuing work with Stroke Survivors, their families and Carers, please get in touch via the details below.

Similarly, if you are able to volunteer your time or expertise to help with any of our activities, we would also be delighted to hear from you.

There are a number of ways to follow our news and updates through social media, using the details listed below. If you don't already use the internet then don't fret! You can simply get in touch over the phone or call into our Stroke information centre.



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ThinkAheadStrokeGroup



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