Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards

kentmentalwellbeingawards.org.uk

2026

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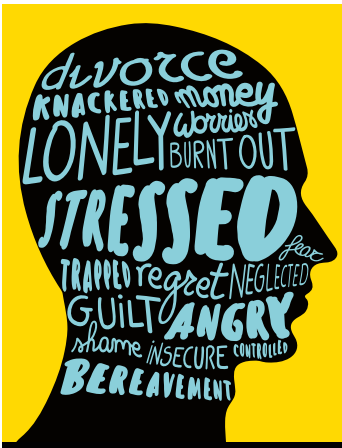
mind in Bexley and East Kent

Proud to present tonight's Awards

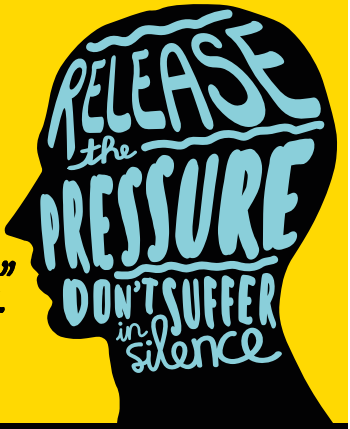
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For information about our services, please visit our websites at: mindinbexley.org.uk or eastkentmind.org.uk

Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards 2026



"I was in a really dark place. Talking helped me realise things would get better."



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For more information visit **releasethepressure.uk**

Welcome to tonight's ceremony

Your hosts for this year's Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards are Simon Dolby, Development Lead at Mind in Bexley and East Kent, and broadcaster and journalist Nicola Everett.

The event begins with a performance by the Rock Choir.

The awards ceremony keynote speaker is Dr Anjan Ghosh, Director of Public Health at Kent County Council.

Our special VIP speaker is author, comedian and disability rights advocate Samantha Baines.

Local area award winners announced

Overall winners revealed

Front page photo: **Henry Ross**, 17, of Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, Faversham, with his trophy design.

Please share photos on Facebook/Instagram and X of tonight's Awards, tag in **@KentMWAwards** and use the hashtag **#KentMWAwards**

Hosted by Mind in Bexley and East Kent, registered charity 1110130

The Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards is supported by:

Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards Winners 2026

Ashford
Kindness Award: **Lisa Haddon, Stuart Williams and Thalia Standen – G4S**
Pastoral Care Award: **Pastoral Care Team – High Halden**

Bromley
Active Sporting Award: **Bromley FC Community Trust's Parkinson's Walking Football**

Bexley
Kindness Award: **Sidcup Community Larder**
Leadership Award: **Emma Seaton – Mindful Mums**

Revival Awards
Age UK Herne Bay and Whitstable – Shed Quarters
Keep Talking Services

Canterbury
Kindness Award: **Ace Brown – Stagecoach**
Ethnic Minorities Award: **Ethnic Minorities in Canterbury**
NHS Award: **Sarah Wackett – NHS**
Business Wellbeing Award: **Sophie Dodds – JOY of You CIC**
Wellbeing School Award: **Kelly Molloy and Wellbeing and Pastoral Care Team – Herne Bay High School**

The Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards is supported by:

Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards Winners 2026

Dartford/Gravesham
Leadership Award: **Jemma Burgess**
Innovation Award: **Mummy's Linkup – Little Gift Bags Project**
Service Delivery Award: **North Kent Mind – Adult Support Services**
Suicide Prevention Award: **Emerge Advocacy**
Veterans Award: **T.J's Public House**

Dover
Group Fundraiser of the Year: **East Kent Spurs Supporters Club**
Fundraiser of the Year - Individual: **Kerry Banks**
Wellbeing Ambassador of the Year: **The Missing Project**

Folkestone
Partnership Project of the Year: **Eden Robertson and Anton Krakowski – Probation Service/Seetec**
Service Delivery Award: **Home Straight Team**

Maidstone
Active Sporting Award: **Steve Grantham - B2R Health Coaching**
Activity Group Award: **Cast a Thought CIC**
Fundraiser of the Year: **Matt Evans – Mid Kent Mind**
Suicide Prevention Award: **Mid Kent Mind - Suicide Prevention**

Medway
Wellbeing Staff Award: **Anchor Foster Care**
Disability Award: **FASD Awareness**
Wellbeing School Award: **Joshua Born – City of Rochester School**
Peer Mentor of the Year: **My Shining Star Children's Cancer Charity**
Community Champion of the Year: **Natasha Steer – Creatabot**
Business Wellbeing Award: **Scallywags**

Photos and video from tonight's ceremony will be available to download at: **kentmentalwellbeingawards.org.uk**

Winners and attendees are asked to share this content on their website and social media, using the hashtag **#KentMWAwards**

Winners 2026

Swale
Wellbeing Space Award: **Abbey Physic Community Garden**
Innovation of the Year: **Age UK Sheppey**
Service Delivery Award: **SATEDA**
Youth Project of the Year: **Jordan Dighton – NexYouth CIC**

Thanet
Volunteer of the Year: **Mary Wade**
NHS Award: **QEQM Therapies Wellbeing Team**
Charity Wellbeing Award: **STAK Life**
Wellbeing Staff Award: **Tony Gander**
Wellbeing Space Award: **Wilderness to Wonderland**

West Kent
Therapist of the Year: **The Counselling Centre**
Partnership Project of the Year: **Creative Connections – West Kent Mind and Town & Country Housing**

Award winners unable to attend this evening:
Volunteer of the Year (Canterbury): **Benedict Sloane – Umbrella**
Veteran of the Year: **Godfrey King**

The Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards is supported by:

Meet our hosts and speakers



Simon Dolby

Development Lead
Mind in Bexley and East Kent

Simon has more than 20 years of experience in Chief Executive roles at charities in the education and mental health sectors. In his early career he was a journalist and News Editor for three Kent newspapers working for both Kent Messenger Group and Kent Regional Newspapers. Simon is currently leading two initiatives, our Veterans Project, and the Wellbeing Ambassador programme – which trains barbers, and salon and nail bar staff to support customers experiencing anxiety and depression.

Nicola Everett

Broadcaster and journalist



Nicola is a very familiar voice in Kent, having spent more than 25 years working in commercial radio news. She is also an experienced podcast host, having written and produced the award-winning KentOnline Podcast, and hosted both series of 'A Journey with Abigail's Footsteps' for the Kent-based baby loss charity. Nicola hosts numerous awards events and ceremonies across Kent and is delighted to be joining you once again at the Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards.
Website: www.nicolaeverett.com



Samantha Baines

Author, comedian & disability advocate

Samantha is an award-winning actress, comedian, author and disability advocate. Her credits include The Crown, Call the Midwife and Silent Witness, alongside presenting roles on BBC shows including The One Show and Morning Live. A proud deaf and disabled woman, she draws on her lived experience to raise awareness and challenge perceptions of deafness. Through her comedy, writing and public speaking, Samantha champions inclusion and representation, bringing warmth, humour and honesty to conversations about disability and everyday life.

Dr Anjan Ghosh

Director of Public Health, Kent County Council



Anjan has been Director of Public Health at Kent County Council since 2022, championing action to reduce health inequalities and improve wellbeing across Kent. Appointed Visiting Professor at Canterbury Christ Church University in February 2026, he is leading work on the Kent Marmot Coastal Region, supporting the NHS Neighbourhood Health model and developing a Centre for Excellence in Public Health with Kent universities. His forthcoming Annual Public Health Report focuses on mental health and creating healthier, more resilient communities.

Mental Health Training

mind in Bexley and East Kent

Mind in Bexley and East Kent provides a wide-range of training, including:

- Mental Health First Aid, for Adults & Young People
- Mental Health Awareness Workshops
- Adult Suicide Prevention
- Young People's Suicide Prevention
- MoneySkills
- Mental Health for Managers



Learn More

Mind in Bexley website
www.mindinbexley.org.uk

East Kent Mind website
www.eastkentmind.org.uk

Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards 2026

Congratulations

TO THE WINNERS OF THE KENT MENTAL WELLBEING AWARDS!

CommunityAd are proud to be part of this fantastic celebration of local success highlighting the incredible achievements and contributions made within our community and we're thrilled to support such a meaningful initiative.



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Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards 2026



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Winners 2026

Ashford

Kindness Award: **Lisa Haddon, Stuart Williams and Thalia Standen – G4S**

G4S colleagues Lisa, Stuart and Thalia stepped in when they found an older woman distressed, confused and driving unsafely in a car park. Recognising that she was vulnerable and at risk, the three patient transport staff worked together to calm her, establish her identity and contact emergency services and her family.

Despite not being mental health specialists, they remained with her throughout the crisis, offering reassurance and ensuring she was never left alone. Their compassion, teamwork and calm response helped keep her safe until paramedics arrived and she was reunited with her family.

Ashford

Pastoral Care Award: **Pastoral Care Team – High Halden**

The Team has created support to help pupils facing bereavement, caring responsibilities and social challenges. Its Healing Together bereavement group, Young Carers Support Group and targeted social skills sessions give children safe spaces to process emotions, build confidence and develop practical coping skills.

The team combines emotional support with play, creativity, mindfulness and carefully structured activities. Teachers report improvements in focus, emotional regulation and peer relationships, while pupils develop empathy and resilience. By recognising individual needs and reducing stigma, the team helps children feel understood, supported and ready to learn.

The Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards is supported by:

Bromley

Active Sporting Award: **Bromley FC Community Trust's Parkinson's Walking Football**

The programme uses football to support people living with Parkinson's in a safe, welcoming and enjoyable environment. Free weekly sessions help participants stay active while developing coordination, balance and motor skills, with activities adapted so people can take part at their own pace.

It also provides valuable social connection, helping to reduce isolation and build friendships between people with shared experiences. Participants report improved confidence, activity levels and wellbeing, while the supportive atmosphere encourages people to keep returning. As one person said, the sessions can make you "forget you have Parkinson's".

Bexley

Kindness Award: **Sidcup Community Larder**

The Larder provides much more than affordable food. It has created a welcoming, stigma-free space where people facing financial pressure, anxiety or isolation can access practical help, connection and support. Working with debt advisers, housing teams, mental health organisations and family services, the Larder helps residents find the right support without having to navigate complex systems alone.

Its choice-based model protects dignity, while warm spaces, trained volunteers and partnerships help reduce isolation and build resilience. By combining practical assistance with kindness and human connection, the Larder is strengthening wellbeing and community spirit across Sidcup.

mind in Bexley and East Kent

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Winners 2026

Bexley

Leadership Award: **Emma Seaton – Mindful Mums**

Emma coordinates Mindful Mums in Bexley. Under her leadership, the service has grown to support more women during pregnancy and early motherhood, including the development of an online antenatal programme and a stronger network of trained volunteers.

Participants describe Emma as supportive, friendly and knowledgeable, and feedback shows the impact of the service on wellbeing, confidence and isolation. Emma's approach is rooted in listening and adapting to what women need, helping to create lasting friendships, stronger support networks and a growing community around mothers and families.

Revival Awards

Age UK Herne Bay and Whitstable – Shed Quarters

The Shed Quarters provide older men with a place to belong, socialise and regain confidence through practical, hands-on activities. For people experiencing retirement, isolation or loss, the Men's Shed provides friendship, routine and purpose while also supporting local schools, charities and community projects.

Members have transformed unused space, built planters for local health settings and created bird-box kits for Girl Guides. Despite rising costs and reduced grant funding, the group has remained resourceful, using donated materials, commissioned projects and sales of handmade items to help keep the Shed affordable, sustainable and welcoming.

Nominations are now open for the 2027 edition of the Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards

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Winners 2026

Revival Awards

Keep Talking Services

The charity provides telephone befriending and emotional support to people experiencing loneliness, isolation and poor mental health across Kent and Medway. Its growing network of nearly 200 volunteers now delivers around 1,200 supportive calls each month, offering regular human connection to people who might otherwise feel forgotten.

It also trains health and social care students to provide structured befriending, giving them valuable experience while strengthening the service. Faced with reduced funding, the team diversified its income and strengthened partnerships, helping it continue delivering accessible, compassionate support despite rising demand.

Canterbury

Kindness Award: **Ace Brown – Stagecoach**

Stagecoach bus driver Ace Brown responded calmly when a passenger Adrian James became seriously unwell during a journey from Herne Bay to Canterbury in the summer. Realising that Adrain needed urgent help, Ace pulled over, helped him from the bus, called 999 and stayed with him until paramedics arrived.

He also contacted Adrian's family and kept them informed, while reassuring Adrian that help was on the way and he was not alone. Adrian's family credited Ace's quick thinking, compassion and calm response with helping him receive urgent medical attention when it mattered most.

The Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards is supported by:

Interview with Samantha Baines

Our VIP speaker is Samantha Baines, an award-winning actress, comedian, author and disability advocate

Your career has spanned acting, comedy, broadcasting and writing. What role has creativity played in supporting your own wellbeing?

Creativity and art are incredibly important to me; it's how I express myself and enjoy myself by watching and participating. The arts can be so undervalued when it comes to mental health but creativity has hugely helped my own mental health. I junk journal, write my experiences into books, write jokes to make people laugh and forget their worries and love being involved in other people's projects as an actor.



Many people struggle with their confidence or may be going through a difficult period in their life. From your experience, what advice would you give them?

It's totally normal to experience a drop in confidence during difficult times, but that doesn't mean you will never be confident again. It is all about working out what works for you and that is whatever makes you feel good. I've worked through difficulties with counsellors, with journalling, my support networks and sometimes just a change of scenery, like having your morning coffee outside can have a big impact. Start small and over time you will grow in confidence and acceptance.

---

mind in Bexley and East Kent

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Samantha Baines interview (continued)

When my Dad died, I couldn't imagine a day when I wouldn't feel sad, when I discovered I was deaf I thought my career in the arts was over and when my newborn daughter was in hospital for three months, I thought I'd never recover. None of those things turned out to be true and each scenario, took one small step to turn the tide.



Comedy can help us talk about difficult subjects in a very human way. Why do you think humour can be such a powerful tool when it comes to wellbeing?

There have been times in my life where if I wasn't laughing, I would have been crying and I'd much rather laugh. The line between comedy and tragedy is thin and humour can help us process but also escape and enjoy a few moments of joy. Never feel guilty for smiling or laughing even in what feels like the toughest times.

These Awards celebrate people and organisations making a difference in Kent. What does good mental wellbeing support look like to you?

Wellbeing support in all forms is so important and thank you for recognising it in all you do. In my opinion every person and organisation making a difference deserves to be hugged by their celebrity crush and have songs sung about them (feel free to insert your favourite reward here if those don't take your fancy). Support can be different depending on the individual so it is very important that a range of support is available. Wellbeing support to me is providing a toolkit; people can use the spanner or the tape measure in their toolkit if it works for them and helps them feel good but if they don't have a toolkit in the first place there is nowhere to turn. Thank you to everyone providing toolkits (metaphorical spanners)

Continued on page 38

Winners 2026

Canterbury

Ethnic Minorities Award: **Ethnic Minorities in Canterbury**

The charity supports people and families from diverse ethnic backgrounds, promoting inclusion, equality and community connection. Its work includes advocacy, cultural events, health initiatives, research partnerships and a Community Space offering signposting, skills development, employment support and opportunities to connect.

The organisation has also shown considerable resilience. After coming close to folding during an internal reorganisation, EMIC recruited new trustees, strengthened its governance and rebuilt capacity. Its renewed focus has enabled it to continue helping people settle, gain confidence, volunteer, find employment and feel a stronger sense of belonging.

Canterbury

NHS Award: **Sarah Wackett – NHS**

Sarah supports staff wellbeing for the Trust Culture & Inclusion Team at East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust. She has completed a range of training that helps her support and signpost colleagues. Sarah has also helped bring physical and financial health checks, and bike repairs onto sites, while working with the Kent and Medway Talking Therapies team to provide regular staff support.

Sarah continually looks for practical ways to improve staff experience, from online escape rooms and yoga to new social opportunities. Despite financial and estate pressures, she helps colleagues feel supported, connected and valued.

The Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards is supported by:

Winners 2026

Canterbury

Business Wellbeing Award: **Sophie Dodds – JOY of You CIC**

Sophie created JOY of You CIC after experiencing the sudden loss of her father, turning her own grief into support for other women facing illness, bereavement, trauma and major life challenges. Through free monthly clinics, she uses semi-permanent makeup and restorative tattooing to help rebuild confidence, identity and self-worth.

JOY has supported more than 100 women, with Sophie giving her time and treatments without payment. Despite receiving no external funding, she has continued investing in the initiative and expanding its reach, creating a compassionate space where clients feel listened to, valued and supported.

Canterbury

Wellbeing School Award: **Kelly Molloy and Wellbeing and Pastoral Care Team – Herne Bay High School**

Kelly and the wellbeing and pastoral care team at Herne Bay High School have been praised for making pupils and parents feel listened to, supported and valued. One parent described how Kelly's kindness, clear communication and practical support helped restore their faith in the education system.

Despite the demands of a large school with around 1,600 pupils, Kelly balances many competing demands while still providing individual attention. Her open, understanding approach gives pupils a safe space when they need it and reassures families that their concerns are listened to and matter.

mind in Bexley and East Kent

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Winners 2026

Dartford/Gravesham

Leadership Award: **Jemma Burgess**

Jemma founded Hope On Prescription CIC, drawing on her own lived experience of adversity and mental health challenges to help others feel less alone. Through writing, poetry and gentle creative activities, she creates spaces where people can express difficult emotions, feel understood and rediscover hope.

Jemma has also developed hospital-based poetry work, community programmes and a radio show. Despite the emotional demands of frontline work, she has strengthened partnerships and safeguarding while keeping compassion, lived experience and kindness at the heart of her approach.

Dartford/Gravesham

Innovation Award: **Mummy's Linkup – Little Gift Bags Project**

Mummy's Linkup has supported women for seven years, offering encouragement, practical help and community connection. Its Little Gift Bags project provides care packages to women in hospital following pregnancy or baby loss, offering practical items alongside a clear message that their grief is recognised.

The project has expanded, allowing more families to be reached. The group has also introduced Afro-Caribbean dry food packages for families facing financial hardship, responding practically to changing community needs. Their ability to continue delivering vital support services despite financial challenges reflects their dedication to the women and families they serve.

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Winners 2026

Dartford/Gravesham

Service Delivery Award: **North Kent Mind: Adult Support Services**

The team provides accessible support for people aged 17 and over across communities facing deprivation and limited access to mental health services. Its work includes one-to-one support, recovery groups, employment help, crisis services and out-of-hours provision, helping people build confidence and reduce isolation.

As referrals have grown, the team has expanded its response. New initiatives include a neurodiversity peer-support group and a peer partnership project for people in crisis. Adult Support Services advocates for each individual, ensuring their rights, needs and voices are recognised and respected.

Dartford/Gravesham

Suicide Prevention Award: **Emerge Advocacy**

The charity is celebrating 10 years of supporting children and young people in severe emotional crisis. Founded after Joy Wright supported a young person in A&E, the charity places youth workers alongside clinical teams, helping young people engage with care and providing follow-up support after discharge. It now works in every Kent hospital with an A&E department.

Over a decade, Emerge has supported more than 5,000 young people in crisis aged 10–25. Despite a difficult funding environment, it has protected frontline services, increased community volunteering and, in 2026, supported more young people than ever before.

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Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards 2026



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Dartford/Gravesham

Veterans Award: **T.J's Public House**

T.J's pub supports local veterans and their families through a monthly breakfast club and an expanding network of informal gatherings. Once month, the pub provides a freshly prepared breakfast and welcoming space where veterans can connect, share experiences and build supportive relationships. Much of the initiative is self-funded by the owners.

Despite rising costs and pressures on the hospitality sector, the pub has continued this support rather than scale it back. Partnerships with neighbouring veteran groups have also extended its reach, creating stronger connections across the wider community.

Dover

Group Fundraiser of the Year: **East Kent Spurs Supporters Club**

The club has grown from a supporters' group into a major community fundraising and wellbeing initiative. Since 2023, Ray Berry, Maria Howdon and Ross White have raised more than £50,000 for local charities and projects, entirely through voluntary effort.

Among their most visible achievements is the installation of 14 Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Benches across East Kent, creating places for reflection and conversation. The team continues to grow support and involvement. Demonstrating that ordinary people can achieve extraordinary things when driven by compassion and a determination to make a difference.

The Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards is supported by:

Winners 2026

Dover

Fundraiser of the Year - Individual: **Kerry Banks**

Kerry has spent 20 years volunteering for Breast Cancer Now, raising more than £340,000 while promoting awareness, supporting campaigns and running an online events and support group with over 4,000 members. She has also helped many other causes and co-created a project that has donated around 9,000 gifts to families in need.

Kerry continually finds new ways to make fundraising engaging and inclusive, from raffles and auctions to music events and major trekking challenges. Even as fundraising has become harder, she keeps events affordable while continuing to support others with remarkable energy and commitment.

Dover

Wellbeing Ambassador of the Year: **The Missing Project**

The Project was founded by artist Deirdre Kashdan to give a voice to women caring for relatives with severe mental health difficulties. Through photography, poetry, performance, spoken word and illustration, more than 300 women across the UK have shared their experiences, often anonymously.

The project helps reduce isolation and bring hidden caring experiences into the open. Deirdre has also raised more than £9,000 through crowdfunding, supporting future exhibitions and workshops. A 2025 exhibition at Canterbury's Beaney Gallery attracted 23,000 visitors, helping these stories reach a much wider audience.

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Winners 2026

Folkestone

Partnership Project of the Year: **Eden Robertson and Anton Krakowski – Probation Service/Seetec**

Eden and Anton have supported one individual through autism, PTSD, anxiety, depression and difficult personal circumstances, providing consistent, compassionate support during an extremely challenging period. Their approach has helped the person feel listened to, respected and involved in decisions about their wellbeing.

By working collaboratively, adapting their communication and coordinating with other professionals, Eden and Anton have provided genuinely person-centred support. Their kindness and commitment have helped build hope and confidence, showing how compassionate teamwork can make a huge difference to someone navigating complex mental health challenges.

Folkestone

Service Delivery Award: **Home Straight Team**

The team supports people across seven Kent local authority areas whose homes and wellbeing are affected by clutter and hoarding behaviours. Through practical help, safeguarding and trauma-informed engagement, the team works with people who may be isolated, at risk or reluctant to accept support, helping restore safety, dignity and independence.

The service also coordinates with housing, health, social care, fire and voluntary organisations to address wider needs. From April to December 2025, it received 231 referrals, often resolving hidden hazards while building the trust needed to create lasting change.

Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards

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Winners 2026

Maidstone

Active Sporting Award: **Steve Grantham – Beginners2Runners**

Steve leads Beginners2Runners Health Coaching Services, combining physical activity with mental health and wellbeing support. Through running, walking and health coaching, participants receive support around anxiety, depression, isolation, sleep, resilience and nutrition while becoming part of a supportive community.

Hundreds have taken part, with participants reporting improvements in mental and physical wellbeing. When funding for the Maidstone group ended, Steve found a new base and members chose to contribute voluntarily so the community could continue. His commitment also extends beyond sessions, supporting people through bereavement and major life changes.

Maidstone

Activity Group Award: **Cast a Thought CIC**

Cast a Thought uses fishing to support wellbeing for people of all ages, from children to pensioners. Trained leaders and volunteers provide activities tailored to individual needs, creating a relaxed environment where people can fish, cook, work together, talk and enjoy time outdoors at their own pace.

The group also runs adult Fish and Chat sessions supporting people experiencing mental health difficulties, bereavement and isolation. Working in partnership with local government, police authorities, organisations and communities, team continues to create safe, accessible and welcoming opportunities for connection.

The Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards is supported by:

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Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards 2026



mind in Bexley

Mental Elf

Festive Fun Run



Sunday 6 December

10am start - Danson Park, Bexleyheath DA6 8HL

Support Mind in Bexley by taking part in our Mental Elf 5km festive fun run

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Winners 2026

Maidstone

Fundraiser of the Year: **Matt Evans – Mid Kent Mind**

After losing his son Kelsey to suicide in 2022, Matt channelled his grief into raising awareness of mental health and fundraising. Through auctions and Spinathon events, he has raised over £68,000 for mental health charities while openly sharing his story and encouraging others to seek support.

Matt's impact goes beyond fundraising. His feedback helped inspire a woodland-based men's Together After Suicide group, creating an informal space for bereaved men to connect. He also speaks publicly about mental health, using his own experience to support others and strengthen community understanding.

Maidstone

Suicide Prevention Award: **Mid Kent Mind - Suicide Prevention**

The charity combines suicide prevention education with targeted wellbeing support for people at increased risk, including young people, new mothers, middle-aged men and people affected by suicide bereavement. Its work includes training, drop-ins, safeguarding support and practical courses designed to help people recognise difficulties and seek help.

The organisation has developed new responses based on community feedback, including Together After Suicide and a woodland-based group for bereaved men, alongside baby massage and parental wellbeing support for new mothers. Its trained team also supports people in crisis while receiving regular supervision for their own wellbeing.

The Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards is supported by:

Medway

Wellbeing Staff Award: **Anchor Foster Care**

Anchor has developed a wide-ranging health and wellbeing programme for staff, supported by a dedicated committee and company directors. Its offer covers mental, physical and financial wellbeing, with counselling, an online GP service, mental health first aid, training and practical support for staff experiencing illness or absence.

The organisation has also built a supportive workplace culture through regular check-ins, flexible arrangements and thoughtful gestures during sickness absence. This approach proved especially important following the loss of a colleague, helping staff support one another while continuing their work with vulnerable children and families.

Medway

Disability Award: **FASD Awareness**

The charity supports individuals and families affected by Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders through support groups, one-to-one sessions, friendship networks, activity days and education. Its work combines lived experience with professional knowledge, helping families feel understood, reduce isolation and build confidence in managing complex challenges.

FASD Awareness also trains professionals across health, education and social care, contributes to national work and has helped establish diagnostic pathways. Despite growing demand and funding pressures, it has expanded online support and continued developing practical tools, webinars and training that improve understanding and access to support.

mind in Bexley and East Kent

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- Talking Therapies

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Winners 2026

Medway

Wellbeing School Award: **Joshua Born – City of Rochester School**

Joshua has transformed peer support at City of Rochester School as its first Digital Peer Mentor Lead. Known for his empathy and awareness, he notices when peers may be struggling and raises concerns with staff, helping ensure vulnerable pupils receive timely support.

Joshua has redesigned peer mentor training, created four specialist digital units and produced a 176-page workbook. He also built a pupil SharePoint page and is training younger pupils to continue the programme after he leaves. His work has strengthened the school's wellbeing, safeguarding and anti-bullying culture while creating a lasting legacy.

Medway

Peer Mentor of the Year: **My Shining Star Children's Cancer Charity**

My Shining Star supports children, young people and families experiencing bereavement, including the loss of a child, parent or sibling. Its flexible support includes one-to-one sessions, group activities, memory-making and peer connection, helping families process grief while rebuilding confidence, resilience and hope.

Creative approaches such as play, art and shared experiences help children express difficult emotions. The charity also provides uplifting days out, residential trips and remembrance activities, creating moments of joy and connection. Its innovative whole-family approach helps reduce isolation and ensures support can continue as families' needs change.

Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards

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Winners 2026

Medway

Community Champion of the Year: **Natasha Steer – Creatabot**

Natasha brings creativity, compassion and wellbeing together through her work with Creatabot and across Medway. Her Me, Myself and I programme has helped participants build confidence, improve wellbeing and become more involved in their communities, while her work with the Medway Arts and Homelessness Forum creates opportunities through art and training.

Natasha also supports work around bereavement and loss and is widely approached for advice on mental health, best practice and policy. Her projects have included exhibitions, street art, creative training and community initiatives shaped alongside the people taking part.

Medway

Business Wellbeing Award: **Scallywags**

The nursery and preschool has embedded staff wellbeing into everyday working life. Its approach includes counselling, mental health support, flexible working practices, consistent supervision and a dedicated wellbeing space where staff can relax, access information and take part in training and health activities.

The nursery has maintained this focus through funding pressures, staff changes and bereavement, while also sharing wellbeing and safeguarding expertise with other early years settings. Strong communication, an open-door approach and supportive relationships have helped create a family feel for staff, reflecting the welcoming environment Scallywags aims to provide.

The Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards is supported by:

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With more than 13,000 homes across the south-east, and as one of Tunbridge Wells' biggest employers, we value individuals' wellbeing, so we are delighted to sponsor these awards.

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Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards 2026

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Winners 2026

Swale

Wellbeing Space Award: **Abbey Physic Community Garden**

The Garden provides an inclusive, welcoming space where people can connect with nature, build relationships and support their wellbeing. Through gardening, volunteering, workshops and community activities, people can develop confidence, learn skills and find a sense of purpose without the formality of traditional mental health services.

Its flexible approach allows people to take part at their own pace, while shared tasks encourage natural peer support and reduce isolation. Despite growing demand and limited resources, the garden continues to offer a free, consistent space that strengthens wellbeing, connection and resilience.

Swale

Innovation of the Year: **Age UK Sheppey**

The charity supports older people experiencing loneliness, isolation, bereavement, declining health and reduced independence. Its Infinity Social and Activity Centre offers flexible attendance alongside activities including exercise, music, crafts, games, outings and social events, helping people stay active, connected and involved in their community.

The organisation also provides tailored dementia support, including Cognitive Stimulation Therapy, memory cafés and the quieter Memory Snug. Door-to-door transport helps remove barriers to taking part. For many older residents, Age UK Sheppey is far more than a service provider. It is a place of connection, routine and belonging.

The Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards is supported by:

Swale

Service Delivery Award: **SATEDA**

The charity supports women and children affected by domestic abuse across Kent, Swale and Maidstone, recognising that recovery can take time and affect every area of life. Through one-to-one support, group programmes, drop-ins and accessible services, women are helped to reduce isolation, rebuild confidence and move towards greater safety and stability.

The organisation continues adapting how support is offered, including an online drop-in, live chat and partnerships that create positive opportunities for families. It is also building relationships with local businesses and delivering training, helping more people recognise domestic abuse and know where support is available.

Swale

Youth Project of the Year: **Jordan Dighton – NexYouth CIC**

Jordan founded NexYouth CIC to improve mental health support for young people in Swale. He has used lived experience, compassion and determination to support young people who have struggled to find help through mainstream pathways, including arranging an intensive package of support for one young person in crisis.

Jordan has also supported a bereaved family following the loss of their 13-year-old daughter, helping with plans for events in her memory. His tireless work is driven by a commitment to ensuring that young people always have somewhere to turn.

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Winners 2026

Thanet

Volunteer of the Year: **Mary Wade**

Mary has volunteered at Maurice House for 16 years, helping create a genuine home-from-home experience for residents. She coordinates volunteers, supports interviews, mentors newcomers and contributes to the events committee, while also hosting fundraising events and afternoon teas at her own home.

Mary listens to what residents enjoy, helping introduce ABBA and Queen tribute performances and arranging one-to-one shopping trips. She also supports staff, relatives and residents with friendship and reassurance. Her commitment goes far beyond what is expected of a volunteer, bringing warmth, energy and practical support to the Maurice House community.

Thanet

NHS Award: **QEQM Therapies Wellbeing Team**

At QEQM Hospital, Margate, 11 colleagues have created a wellbeing team supporting staff. Made up of Wellbeing Champions, Mental Health First Aiders and Trauma Risk Management practitioners, they provide information, activities, wellbeing conversations and signposting while finding practical ways to build connection across a busy hospital environment.

Initiatives include Wellbeing Wednesdays, walks, shared lunches, national food days, staff recognition and support for new starters. During a difficult consultation process, the team increased its check-ins and made confidential wellbeing conversations available. Despite workload and shift-pattern pressures they continue to put colleagues first.

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Winners 2026

Thanet

Charity Wellbeing Award: **STAK Life**

STAK Life supports autistic people, neurodivergent families and professionals across Kent. It is named Stefan's Acts of Kindness in memory of Tristan and Emma's son, Stefan. The charity enables people to understand and effectively support neurodivergent young people in the local community.

One family described how the charity stepped in when they felt let down by statutory services, providing training that helped them better understand autism and practical strategies that transformed communication and connection at home. They provide hope, strength and the tools to move forward positively.

Thanet

Wellbeing Staff Award: **Tony Gander**

Tony is a Kent Fire and Rescue Service Safe and Well Officer whose commitment to veterans has extended the reach of his role. During home visits, he has identified veterans who are vulnerable or socially isolated, built trust and connected them with welfare organisations, support groups and Veterans' Coffee Mornings.

His approach has helped strengthen referral pathways and influenced wider practice. During a period of transition within the Armed Forces Network, Tony helped maintain veteran outreach and relationships with external partners. His work has also contributed to a model being replicated nationally by the RAF Benevolent Fund.

The Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards is supported by:

Interview with Samantha Baines

A continuation of our interview with Samantha Baines:

You've spoken openly about your experience of hearing loss. How has that shaped the way you think about confidence, inclusion and mental wellbeing?

I am deaf, wear hearing aids and have ADHD and a joint condition called hEDS, so I am deaf and disabled. If you had told me 20 years ago that I would be deaf and disabled before 40, I would have thought it was the worst thing that could happen to me. Now, I love being deaf and part of the disabled community and wouldn't change it. My acceptance happened through counselling, community, writing, learning, talking and living my reality. I want everyone with a diagnosis like mine or otherwise to have access to community, support and to go on a journey of acceptance and eventually joy and confidence in who they are. We are all fabulous humans and we deserve to celebrate ourselves (and each other).



Finally, if you could give the general public one piece of advice on being more inclusive to deaf people, what would you suggest?

Supporting deaf people and deaf candidates at work with accessibility and understanding is so important. Taking a deaf awareness course rather than expecting the deaf person to educate you, facing the person with good lighting so they can lipread, providing captions on videos and at live events, understanding the toll that constantly trying to hear and advocating for yourself takes, learning some basic sign language can all make a huge difference.

To find out more about Samantha, please visit: **samanthabaines.com**

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Winners 2026

Thanet

Wellbeing Space Award: **Wilderness to Wonderland**

The project transforms neglected spaces in Thanet into vibrant community gardens. Volunteers have improved sites including Margate Station approach, Westbrook Beach slopes and gardens at Zion Place and Millmead Family Hub, creating places where people can sit, meet and enjoy nature.

Projects have included a plants-for-schools initiative and community bulb planting. Fundraising events and a supportive social group also bring volunteers together, helping to sustain the gardens while building friendships and a sense of community. Through gardening, volunteers benefit from social connection, a shared sense of purpose and spending time outdoors.

West Kent

Therapist of the Year: **The Counselling Centre**

Tunbridge Wells Counselling Centre provides accessible counselling for people experiencing emotional and psychological distress, including those unable to afford private therapy or access timely NHS support. Through subsidised counselling and its Assisted Places Scheme, clients can receive longer-term therapeutic support regardless of financial circumstances.

The Centre also works with YMCA Ryder House to provide fully funded counselling for vulnerable young people in supported accommodation. In 2025, it delivered more than 3,800 counselling sessions. Despite increasing demand, staff and volunteer counsellors continue providing professional support designed to prevent difficulties escalating into crisis.

The Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards is supported by:

West Kent

Partnership Project of the Year: **Creative Connections – West Kent Mind and Town & Country Housing**

West Kent Mind and Town & Country Housing deliver Creative Connections – a wellbeing programme in communities across Tunbridge Wells borough. Sessions provide residents with opportunities to meet neighbours, take part in creative activities and access wellbeing support.

Feedback from the first pilot groups was strongly positive, with everyone saying they enjoyed attending and 90% felt more confident. The partnership is now developing a wider wellbeing programme and peer support training to enable residents to lead activities within their own communities – helping to reduce isolation and improve mental health.

Award winners unable to attend the ceremony:

Volunteer of the Year (Canterbury): **Benedict Sloane – Umbrella**

Benedict first came to Canterbury Umbrella as a member looking for support. Five years later, he now volunteers at the centre, runs a weekly craft group and uses his artwork to bring people together, start conversations and raise awareness of the charity.

His contribution extends from painting murals and creating cards to fundraising and encouraging others to visit the centre – especially through social media. Despite significant health challenges, Benedict remains a cheerful and committed presence, offering friendship and support to others while helping increase Umbrella's profile, footfall and sense of community.

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Winners 2026

Award winners unable to attend the ceremony:

Veteran of the Year: **Godfrey King**

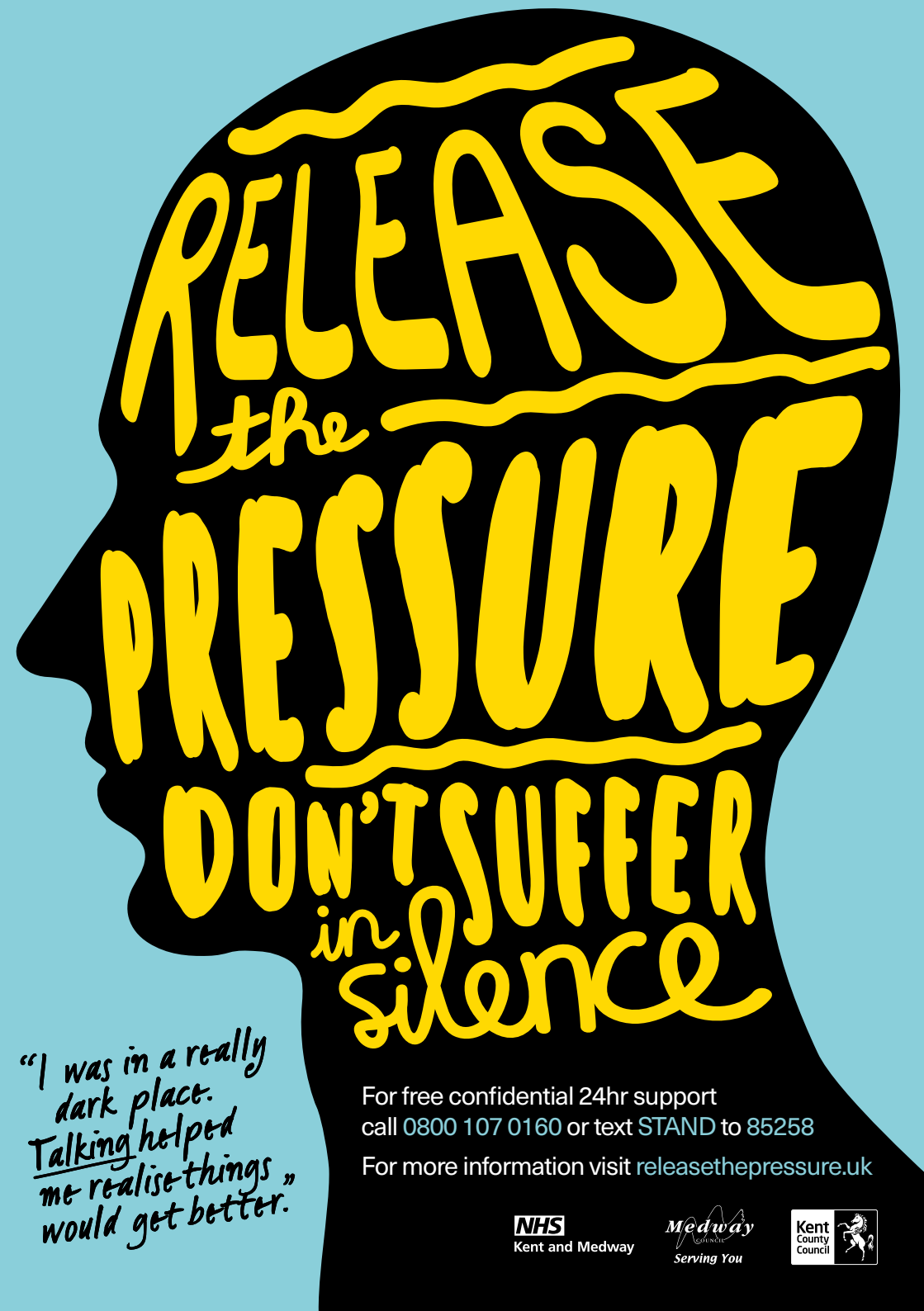
In his Nineties, Godfrey King remains deeply involved in village life in Blean. He is vice-chairman of the Village Hall Management Committee, supports community events, runs quizzes, raises funds and regularly opens the village museum he originally established with his late wife in 2000.

The museum now contains more than 2,000 carefully catalogued artefacts, documents and photographs. Godfrey also supports local schools, charities and organisations, and continues taking on new responsibilities. His long-standing dedication has been recognised locally, including a memorial garden bench celebrating his and his late wife Dorothy's service to the village.

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