The Wren Project: Impact Report 24-25

The Wren Project

In our fourth year, the Wren Project has continued to respond to rising demand for mental health support for people living with autoimmune disease; conditions that remain chronically under-recognised and under-supported. Increasing awareness across NHS clinics and partner charities has driven our highest referral numbers to date. Our volunteer community has also grown significantly, enabling us to support more people, including those living with severe distress and suicidal thoughts. Our contribution to academic research has also deepened. Through collaborations with Cambridge University and participation in multidisciplinary studies, we are helping to evidence the psychological needs of people with autoimmune disease, shining a light on these often misunderstood and under diagnosed conditions.

In Year 4:

415 Wrens have been supported

62 volunteers have been trained

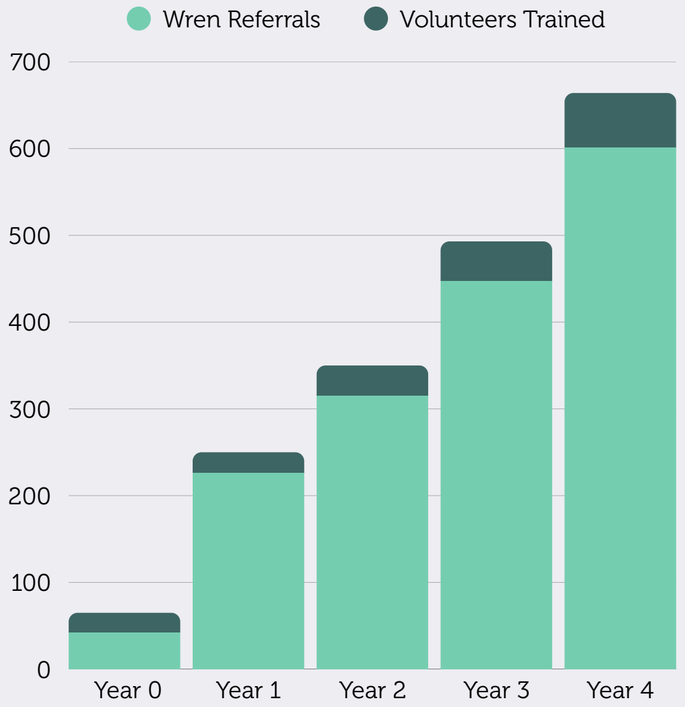
2830 hours of support given

Since inception:

1210 wrens have been supported

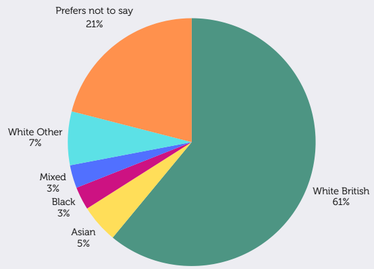
211 volunteers have been trained

8465 hours of support given

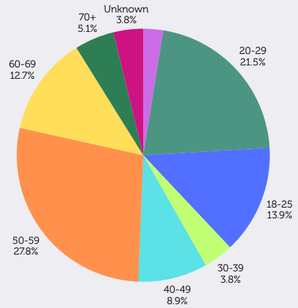


Wren demographics:

Ethnicity

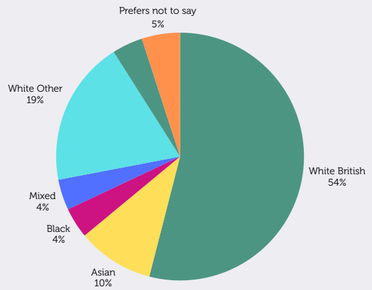


Age

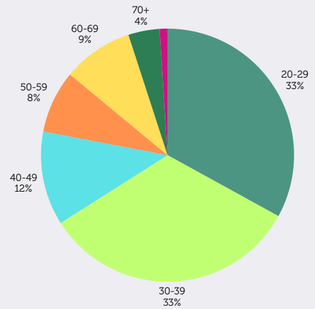


Volunteer demographics:

Ethnicity



Age



Over six million people in the UK are living with an autoimmune disease. This figure is on the rise. [1.]

Autoimmune disease is where the immune system mistakenly attacks the body's own tissues and includes conditions such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, Hashimoto's thyroiditis, and coeliac disease. 50% are considered rare and include Addison's disease, Guillain–Barré syndrome, Sjögren's syndrome and sarcoidosis

With 1 in 10 people being diagnosed with an autoimmune disease, it has never been more important to have the right support available.

10% of the UK population

have an autoimmune disease [1.]

80 types of autoimmune diseases

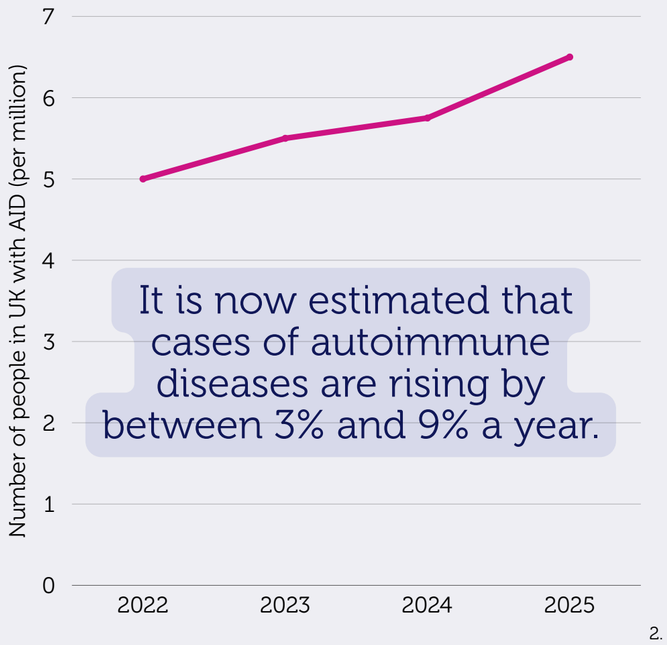
are recognised and treated in the UK [1.]

7 years

is the average length of time for an autoimmune disease diagnosis [1.]

80%

of some autoimmune disease cases predominantly affect women [4.]



It is now estimated that cases of autoimmune diseases are rising by between 3% and 9% a year. [2.]

The mental health impact of living with an autoimmune disease:

In a RAIRDA report, 61% of respondents state they are struggling to cope with their condition. 45% of respondents reported that either they or their partners had reduced their working hours or had been forced to give up work entirely as a result of their condition. [3.]

Of those who contact us **60% express 'end of life' thoughts**

15% present as 'immediate risk to life' when they contact us

1. Oxford University Autoimmune Disease Research study, 2023
2. 2023, The Lancet, Volume 401, Issue 10391, 1878 - 1890
3. RAIRDA Report, 2019
4. AJPH, 2010. PMID: 20864721

Our support is a crucial lifeline

Demonstrating the power of our listening support service for people living with autoimmune disease.
The impact on Wrens after 6 months of listening support:

97%
felt more hopeful

80%
were less distressed

89%
had greater resilience

62%
felt less lonely

82%
felt more adaptable

79%
improved self-advocacy

Hope and resilience soar while distress and loneliness plummet thanks to our listening support service.
Participants consistently experienced a boost in hope for the future and personal resilience through the Wren Project. By 3 months, hope and resilience showed significant upticks, which maintained or saw further improvement at 6 months. This indicates that the Wren Project's support quickly instils optimism and coping strength.

Feelings of distress and loneliness significantly declined over the course of the programme. Many Wrens felt markedly less alone and upset by their condition after engagement with the Wren Project; an important emotional relief that was evident as early as 3 months.

Independent statistical analysis (November 2025) measuring wellbeing after 3-6 months of support for all Wrens plus a focus on our impact on those aged 18-25

100% of 18-25's felt more hope for their future after our support

Young adults face the highest rates of autoimmune diagnosis and the greatest mental-health impact.
The Wren Project is often the first place they finally feel understood. At a time when so many feel overwhelmed and unseen, our service is a lifeline: a place to talk, rebuild, and be heard

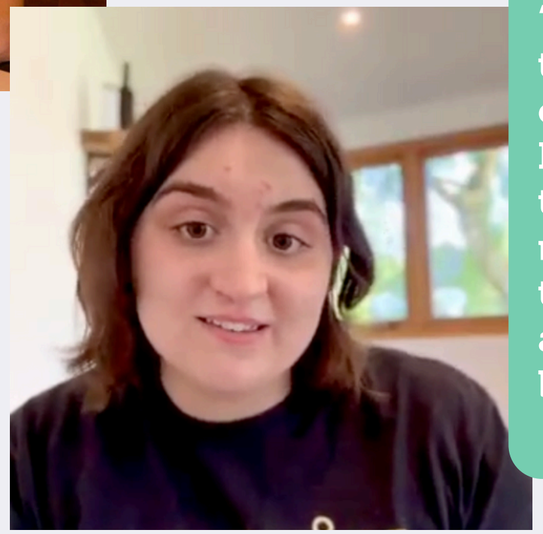
18-25 year olds have the poorest disease outcomes and the highest rates of mental health issues.

Effects of chronic illness on adolescents and young adults include poor mental health (especially girls), low levels of resilience, poor relationships, poor school attendance, depression and anxiety.

If not addressed, these young people face a range of serious, long-term effects on their wellbeing and development including poor academic performance, social isolation, behavioural problems, increased risk of substance abuse, higher risk of suicide, and difficulty securing employment and maintaining relationships.



“The Wren Project was the best thing I did. Speaking to others made me feel less isolated and alone. It allowed me to learn how to manage situations and it gave me a place to go where I wasn’t the ‘odd one’ or the ‘fussy one’, I could just be Laura.”

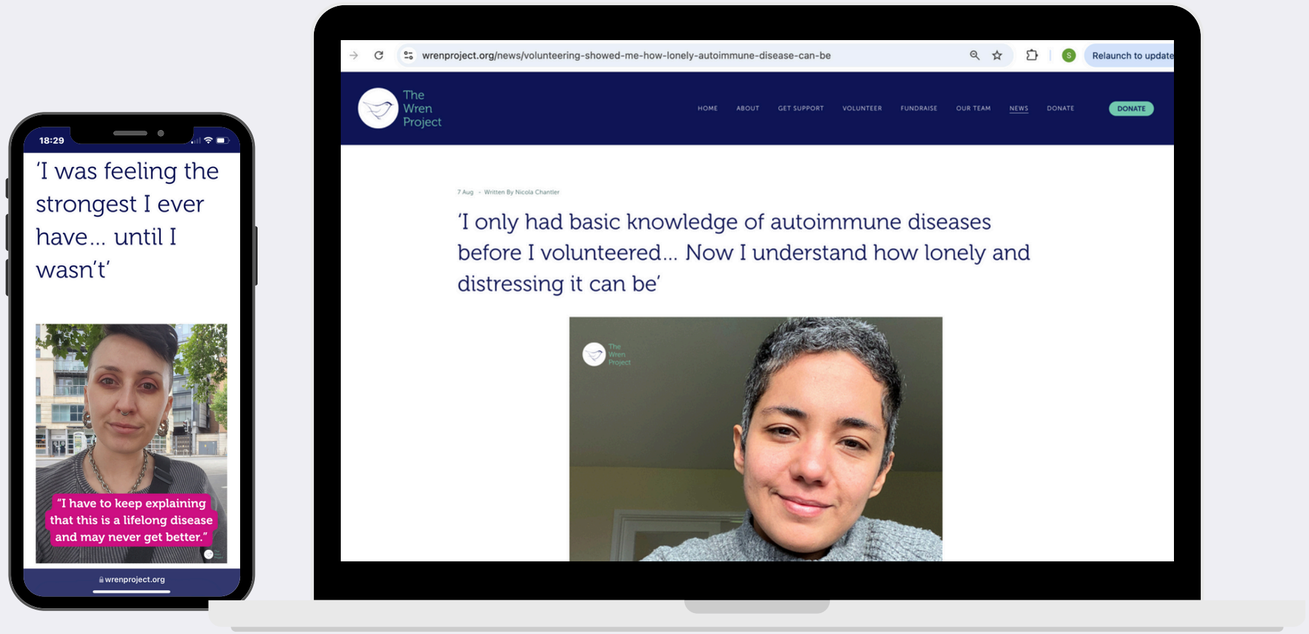


“I missed out on my teenage years because of my ulcerative colitis. It’s been really difficult to see my friends live a regular life whilst I have to slow down. You stop and think ‘this is not the life I want for myself’.”

Our digital impact

We have achieved significant growth across our website and social media channels in year 4. We have reached more people than ever before, growing our online community and raising awareness of the realities of living with an autoimmune disease.

Wren Voices and Volunteer Voices are a key element of our digital strategy; sharing raw, real and inspiring stories of people within our community with an aim of helping others to feel less alone,



337,838
people saw or engaged with our digital content

43,935
website page views
470% increase

8090
views on 'apply for support' website pages

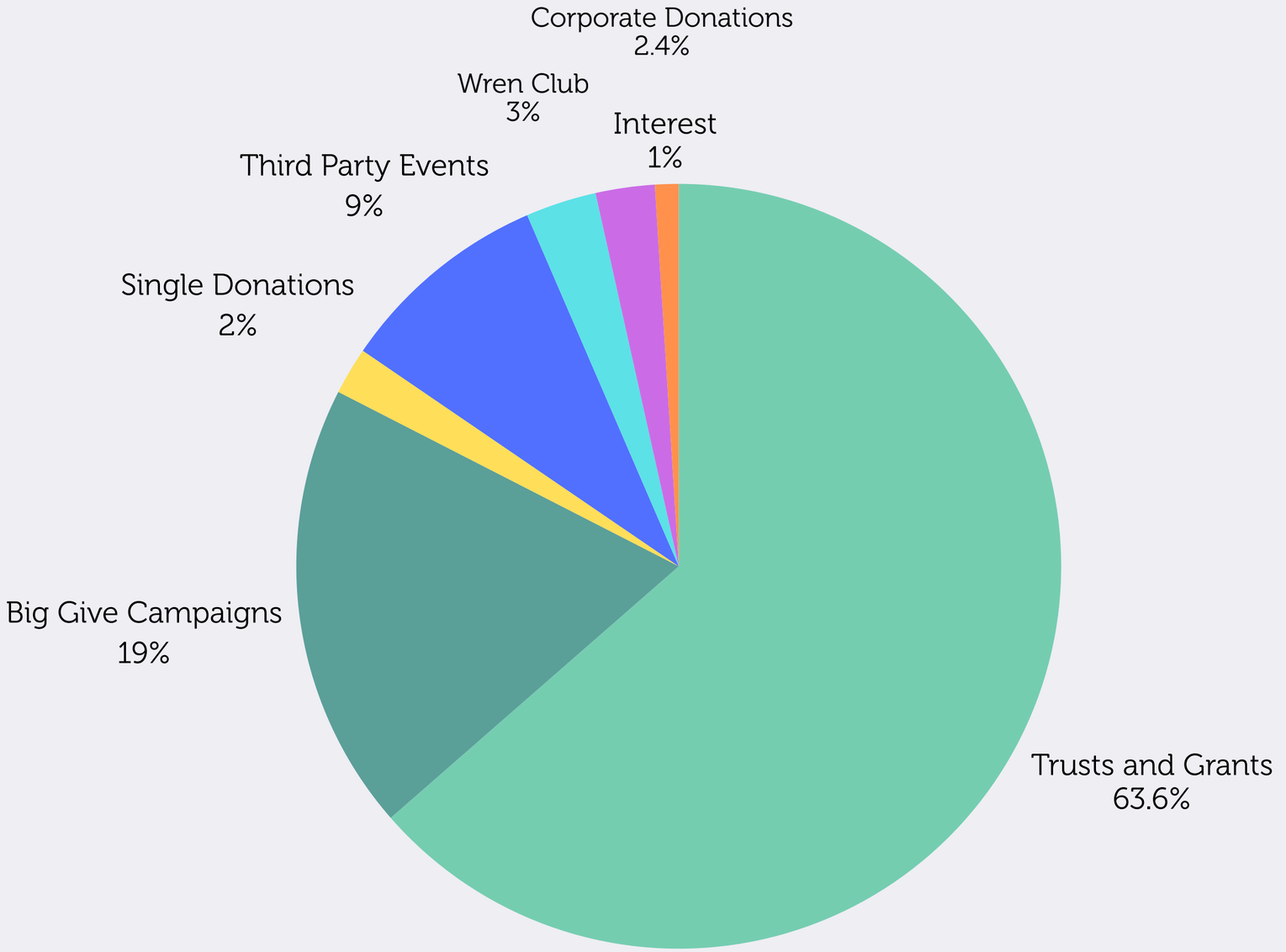
112,000
views on Instagram
627.9% increase

64,714
people reached on Facebook
444% increase

Income Streams Distribution

In Year 4, the Wren Project generated £372,000 in total income, reflecting strong and diversified growth across our fundraising streams driven primarily by a significant uplift in Trusts and Foundations and a number of successful Big Give campaigns.

Additional contributions from Third Party Events, individual giving, and recurring Wren Club support further strengthened our financial position. Overall, Year 4 demonstrates both increased donor confidence and the effectiveness of our fundraising strategy.



A huge thank you

We would not be able to support those living with autoimmune disease without the continued support we receive from trusts, foundations, donors and fundraisers.

Every penny makes a huge difference to us. It allows us to train more volunteers and ultimately to support more people living in distress with autoimmune disease. We could not do this vital work without you.



The Henry Smith Foundation
National Lottery Community Fund
National Lottery Awards for All
Schreier Foundation
Albert Hunt
Garfield Weston
Global Make Some Noise
Randal Foundation
Bseisu Foundation
Lupus UK
The Pixel Fund
Tony Bury
The Big Give Trust
CMS Social Impact Fund
Trixie Brennikmeijer
CHK Foundation
The Hospital Saturday Fund
Heffner Rosenwald Howard Foundation
Carlton Hayes Mental Health Charity

The Wren Club monthly donations

We also want to thank our Wren Club members for their support. The Wren Club is a subscription to make a monthly donation of an amount of your choice. It allows us to make a real difference in the lives of people with autoimmune disease.

Join the Wren Club

Research Contributions

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

The Wren Project is pioneering sector-changing research with Cambridge University, producing nationally recognised evidence on lived experience and the mental-health burden of autoimmune diseases and the impacts of psychosocial support. Our co-authored studies are already influencing clinicians, researchers, and NHS partners, with multiple further studies in progress that will define best practice for years to come. As we enter Year 5, our expanding research portfolio will continue to generate sector-changing insights and set a new standard for evidence-based autoimmune support.

Rheumatology International: Published

"My world has shrunk": a mixed-methods exploration of the impact of systemic autoimmune rheumatic diseases on patients' lives

This study identified that patients living with systemic autoimmune rheumatic diseases (SARDs) report dramatically reduced quality of life and poorer mental wellbeing highlighting how unpredictable, invisible symptoms undermine work, relationships, and mental health. Something we at the Wren Project hear every day from those we support.

ADAPT Feasibility Trial: Published

A recent study by Cambridge university found that the Wren Project's listening support significantly improves the mental health of individuals living in distress with lupus, compared to other psychosocial interventions.

The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of listening support, exercise (pilates) and video/text messages of support on lupus patient wellbeing.

Overwhelmingly, the Wren Project's listening support was rated highest for improving mental health. Over 71 per cent of participants reported that the Wren Project had often/always made them feel better, compared to 57 per cent for Pilates and 48 per cent for the text/video group.

A further 89 per cent said listening support offered by the Wren Project was always/often helpful, in comparison to 62 per cent for pilates and 52 per cent for text/video). 96 per cent said they would recommend the Wren Project to others, while 92 per cent said our support was easy to access.

I am incredibly proud of what we have achieved in our fourth year.
We have expanded our support significantly, working with 415 Wrens across the UK and training 62 new volunteers; our highest number in any year since we began. Throughout this growth, we have remained uncompromising in our commitment to quality, continually measuring and improving our service through regular feedback and evaluation.

The impact we are having on people's ability to live with autoimmune disease is profound. People tell us they feel more hopeful, less distressed, and less alone. This transformation is at the heart of everything we do."

Thank you for being part of our growth and our success. Whether you are a Wren, a volunteer, a fundraiser, a stakeholder, or someone who simply follows and believes in our work, you are part of our community and we are deeply grateful for your support.

Looking ahead to Year five, our ambition is to be bold and rooted in our mission: to build even more community and expand our reach to people across the UK who are living with the weight of autoimmune disease. Every day, we meet people who feel scared, isolated, or unheard and every day the Wren community helps change that. If you are able, we would be deeply grateful for your support. Your donation, whatever the amount, helps us bring hope, comfort, and connection to someone who truly needs it."

Kate Middleton
CEO at The Wren Project



The Wren Project

Make a donation at
www.wrenproject.org/donate