

February 2026

£4m restoration at iconic church

NEWARK Parish Church is to be removed from the at risk register thanks to a £4m restoration.

Grade I-listed St Mary Magdalene required major improvements, including repairs to a leaking roof, under a Reawakening project.

But now Historic England has said the church, which had to close in November 2024, was no longer a problem.

Jane Holt, of Historic England, added: "We are able to take the church off the at risk register this year, which was one of the aims for this project.

"I can't tell you how good it feels to come in here and not see buckets catching water from the roof."

As well as the new roof, there is a new space for community activities, thanks to the work of volunteers, donors, and fundraisers.

Churchwarden **Andrew Fearn**, who led the Reawakening project, said there had been setbacks, but they got there in the end.

The church, which, it is thought, has the fifth highest spire in England, is also a community space, hosting toddler groups, youth hangouts, a community cafe, library group, flower festivals, and concerts.

Parish priest the **Rev Danny Marshall** said: "This church is such a pivotal thing in the life of this town."



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FROM left, Anna Martin, principal of Magnus C of E Academy; author Tom Percival; and Heather Jackson, Magnus Learning Resource Centre manager, with with year 7 Magnus students. PHOTO: Lou Brimble.

Author inspires students as they receive book gift

AUTHOR **Tom Percival** visited year 7 students at Magnus Church of England Academy in Newark to talk about his career and ideas behind his latest book, *The Wrong Shoes*.

Tom said: "Its core is about resilience and overcoming challenge — of not giving up, even when things feel impossible.

"It's about trying to make the right choices, whatever challenges you are experiencing."

Tom also spoke to students about pursuing their own dreams, adding: "It doesn't matter if it's music, writing, or football — it takes effort, and it is hard to get good at anything.

"So, we talked about the importance of resilience, of failing, and improving on

your failures. That mindset is applicable to almost everything you face in life, not just work skills, but also friendships and relationships or hobbies.

"I really hope my talk inspires students not only to develop resilience, but also to develop a love of reading and of engaging with books."

Academy assistant principal **Sarah Harper** added: "At Magnus we value the impact reading can have on our students. It's so important that they get the opportunity to hear from a published author, to understand what inspired them, see where that creativity stems from, and where that creativity can lead."

All year 7 students received a copy of Tom's book, courtesy of the academy, and had the chance to get it signed.

The author said: "It's a wonderful idea that Magnus gift a book to every year 7 student. I do a lot of work with the National Literacy Trust, and a key objective is accessibility to books, and for everyone to have books within their reach. It is a huge part of encouraging children to read."

Heather Jackson, Magnus Learning Resource Centre manager, said: "We are delighted to once again present our Year 7 students with a book, with the hope that it inspires them to continue reading throughout their journey at Magnus.

"Our gift of a book celebrates the importance of reading in a student's journey. It helps them grow, learn, and flourish, supporting our vision to develop individuals of good character."

Free entry to attractions during lottery open week

HUNDREDS of National Lottery-funded venues across the UK are gearing up to say thank you to players with free and discounted admission offers.

During National Lottery Open Week in March, players can present any ticket or screenshot of a digital game, including Lotto, EuroMillions, Set 4 Life, Thunderball, National Lottery Scratchcard and Instant Win Game, to take advantage of the annual scheme.

Among the venues taking part locally with free entry offers are the National Trust's Clumber Park (7th to 14th); The Workhouse and Infirmary, Southwell (11th to 14th); Hardwick Hall (7th to 13th)

English Heritage is offering free entry to Bolsover Castle from 7th to 15th March, while The National Holocaust Museum, Laxton has a two-for-one offer from 9th to 13th March.

Newark Museum – National Civil War Centre has free entry on 7th March, and from 10th to 14th March.

●To see all venues taking part across the country and admission offers, go to www.nationallotteryopenweek.com

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Medieval musical pieces recreated by students

STUDENTS at Newark's world-renowned School of Musical Instrument Crafts revived music from nearly a millennium ago by constructing medieval musical instruments as part of their annual Fiddle Race event.

The school, which is part of Newark College and features students undertaking foundation and advanced courses, was set a challenge by Newark and Sherwood District Council as part of its Castle Gatehouse Project.

Students, working in groups, were tasked to recreate a medieval instrument within a week after studying for months to understand what instruments were played back in medieval times.

Students could recreate whatever they wanted, providing there was historic evidence of it existing and materials used were accurate to the period.

Winning teams included: Overall winner — Crewth Gang; Most Authentic — Rebels Without A Cause; Best Craftmanship — Vielleodrome; Innovation and Creativity — Farfalle.

All instruments made will be on display at a special exhibition when the Castle Gatehouse project has been completed. They will sit in the Bishop Alexander room, which hopes to recreate feelings of the past with the winning instrument staying in the room permanently. Visitors will also be able to hear recordings of the instrument being played.

The project aims to improve public access, and enhance and protect surrounding gardens and green space.

Coun Rowan Cozens, deputy leader and portfolio holder for Heritage, Culture, and the Arts, said: "This was a once-in-a-



lifetime opportunity for expert instrument makers to put their excellent craft to the test to make an instrument time has all but forgotten.

"Now we've brought that 12th Century sound back to modern times so we can really get a sense of what life and atmosphere was like almost 1,000 years ago.

"Students came up with some fascinating pieces and a huge thank you to The National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Lottery players for funding this unique event."

Penny Taylor, head of Newark Campuses at Lincoln College, said: "For

decades, the School of Musical Instrument Craft in Newark has stood at the heart of Britain's instrument-making tradition, nurturing craft, precision, and a deep respect for musical heritage.

"The Guitar and Fiddle Race has become a cherished tradition in Newark — a chance for students to celebrate their craft, test their abilities, and support one another. Events like this show how creativity and craftsmanship thrive under challenge.

"Our students exceed expectations each year, and we look forward to seeing how this tradition continues to inspire future makers."

New relief unveiled on General Sikorski statue



A NEW relief on the statue of General Władysław Sikorski at Newark Cemetery has been unveiled.

General Sikorski, Poland's prime minister and Commander-in-Chief of the country's Armed Forces in exile during the second world war, lost his life on 4th July, 1943 in a plane crash in Gibraltar.

His body was brought to Newark and laid to rest at the Polish Memorial, where it remained until repatriation in 1993.

The Commonwealth War Graves in Newark Cemetery continue to be a place of remembrance, the final resting place of 397 Polish service personnel war graves and serving as a symbol of shared history.

In 2023 a life-size bronze statue of General Sikorski was unveiled. It was

created by sculptor **Andrew Lilley**, who also completed the new relief, which features an image of Winston Churchill, General Sikorski, and General Charles de Gaulle standing together by a tank.

Coun **Neil Ross**, Armed Forces champion at Newark and Sherwood District Council, said: "This addition to the statue is not just a piece of art — it is a profound symbol of courage, leadership, and international solidarity."

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Football club launches membership scheme

BRINGING supporters, players, and the wider community closer to the heart of Newark Town Football Club is the aim of its new membership scheme.

The initiative invites fans and residents to become part of the club's future.

For £10 they can become a shareholder of Newark's supporter-owned club.

Members will enjoy a range of benefits, including:

- The right to attend and vote at the annual meeting.

- The chance to stand for election to the board or vote for fellow members.

- An official membership card and share certificate, signifying their recognised connection to Newark Town FC.

In addition, members will receive a triannual newsletter, providing updates on club news, community events, and progress across both the senior and youth sections.

Matchdays will also become even more rewarding, with members enjoying a 10% discount on hot food and drinks at the Tom Mann Pavilion.

Membership secretary Keir Gale said:

"This membership scheme is a big step forward for Newark Town Football Club. It's about giving our supporters a real voice and recognising the importance of community involvement in grassroots football.

"Every membership directly supports the continued growth of the club and helps us invest in the next generation of local players."

Memberships are now open and the club is encouraging supporters of all ages to get involved.

For more information or to join, go to www.newarktownfc.com/payments/shareholder-membership-143310.html

First formed in 1868, Newark Town FC has been a community interest society since 2017, owned and operated by members of the local community and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

The club's senior teams play their home games at the YMCA Newark and Sherwood Community and Activity Village on Lord Hawke Way.

Admission to men's first-team home games is £8 adults, £6 for over-65s, and £2 for those aged 16 to 18. Under-16s are admitted free.

Admission to ladies' first-team home games is free.

The club has more than 600 players in over 30 teams:

- Boys and girls from under-7s to under-18s
- Men's and ladies' senior teams
- Men's first team playing in the United Counties League Premier Division at Step 5 of the football pyramid (tier nine of the men's game in England.)
- Ladies' first team playing in the East Midlands Regional Women's Football League at the sixth level of the women's game in England.

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Pitching in to transform club's playing surface!

NEWARK Brazil FC has seen its playing field transformed after being identified by Specsavers' Best Worst Pitch initiative as one of 50 clubs in most need of support.

The football club has now received professional line-marking equipment, GPS pitch mapping technology, and expert maintenance training to make their playing facilities visible once again.

Having been without a permanent home since the closure of the Flowserve Sports and Social Club in 2019, the club impressed Specsavers with its unwavering commitment and community spirit, despite facing significant challenges in maintaining pitch quality across their multiple sites at Claypole Community Park.

As a result, Newark Brazil FC, along with clubs from across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, will now benefit from the campaign, which aims to tackle one of the most pressing issues facing grassroots football in the UK — poor pitch conditions.

The responsibility for maintaining club pitches increasingly falls on dedicated volunteers, often using outdated or inadequate equipment.

Steve 'SOS' Parr (pictured), the 71-year-old groundskeeper, coach and stalwart of Newark Brazil FC, who keeps the club's pitches in shape, said the new equipment was already having a positive impact, adding: "Pitch maintenance had been challenging.

"The old line marker was more than 50 years-old, and it would take me at least three hours to mark out one pitch.

"Now, with the new equipment we've been given, it takes me less than 10 minutes. It's going to be a game changer!"

Stuart Franks, club chairman, said: "This is absolutely massive for Newark Brazil FC. We've been working tirelessly to provide the best possible experience for our young players, but maintaining quality pitch markings across our sites has been an ongoing struggle, especially without a permanent home.

"To be selected as one of 50 clubs from across the entire UK is testament to the dedication of our volunteers who turn up week after week, rain or shine, to keep our pitches playable.

"This equipment will make a transformational difference to our club



and the young footballers we serve."

The Best Worst Pitch initiative was launched by Specsavers in partnership with football legend **Gary Neville**. It builds on the brand's long-standing commitment to grassroots football through its Best Worst Team campaign.

Over the past four seasons, Specsavers has documented the journeys of struggling grassroots teams.

Neil Liddle, brand partnerships and sponsorships lead at Specsavers, said: "Since we have been supporting clubs that need a bit of help with their eyes and ears, as well as their game, we've noticed the effort that goes into keeping grassroots clubs running.

"Clubs like Newark Brazil, who quietly put in the hard work behind the scenes to keep pitches playable, despite not having a permanent home, embody what grassroots football is all about.

"This initiative means we can support more clubs and communities across the UK. By making faded lines more visible, we're helping players see the beautiful game more clearly."

Clear and accurate line markings are vital not just for ensuring structure and fairness in the game, but also for helping players and officials navigate the pitch, enhancing visibility,

spatial awareness, and overall safety throughout play.

For Newark Brazil FC, whose teams compete in the Young Elizabethan League and cup competitions across the East Midlands, the improved pitch markings will provide a significant boost to the training session and match experience for players, coaches, and officials alike.

Founded in 2009, the club's ethos of 'It's their game - let them play' has seen it grow into a family-oriented organisation serving more than 300 players, parents, and siblings across multiple age groups, all supported by FA-qualified coaches dedicated to helping every player reach their full potential.

To learn more about the initiative, go to Specsavers' social pages.

● To watch Newark Brazil's transformation film, go to www.instagram.com/p/DTe84nTDMU1 and www.facebook.com/share/v/1DEJ3vq4mY

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Hospice at Home to help 1,000 more people

BEAUMOND House Hospice Care is aiming to support an additional 1,000 patients a year through the growth of its Hospice at Home service.

The Newark hospice has been awarded a new care contract to lead on the creation of an End of Life Referral Hub and expand its services across Newark, Sherwood, Mansfield, Ashfield, and Bassetlaw.

It will also lead on the creation of a new End of Life Referral Hub.

The news comes after the hospice was awarded a new contract from NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) as part of the North Nottinghamshire End of Life Care Alliance.

Beaumont House's Hospice at Home service is currently provided to more than 200 patients across Newark and Sherwood each year. The new contract will see the service expand within Newark and Sherwood, and additionally cover Mansfield, Ashfield and Bassetlaw from April 2026 — meaning Beaumont House can care for an additional 1,000 patients a year in their place of choice.

The new service will see the creation of a dedicated End of Life Referral Hub to help ensure people are not left struggling to navigate care at one of the most difficult times in their lives. Supported by £1.8m from Macmillan Cancer Support's End-of-Life Care Fund, this investment is about giving more people the chance to be cared for with comfort, dignity and compassion, closer to home.

The hub will ensure a single point of access for end-of-life care in North Nottinghamshire. It will provide a central oversight of referrals to support patients with personalised care during times of rapidly deteriorating needs, within the final days and weeks of life — maintaining more patient choice and responding to the changing circumstances seven days a week.

This news also means that the Butterfly Project, a volunteer-led care service from Your CVS, will continue to provide practical and emotional support to patients and their families across Newark and Sherwood, and expand to support Mansfield, Ashfield and Bassetlaw.

Louise Sinclair, chief executive at Beaumont House Hospice Care, said: "We're very proud to have been chosen as the lead provider for this additional care service and new End of Life Referral Hub



in North Nottinghamshire.

"It will make a huge difference and enable us to reach more people in our communities, giving them the care they need in their final months of life.

"At present, palliative care services delivered by ICB-registered care providers in North Nottinghamshire include a mix of health and social care, but they do not have the expertise of hospice care.

"It is clear that a hospice-led model achieves better outcomes, and this new service will mean that more people have access to personalised hospice care.

"The new contract has only been possible with the support of Nottinghamshire ICB, the Macmillan Cancer Support End-of-Life Care Fund and members of the North Nottinghamshire End of Life Care Alliance — we're very grateful for their support.

"This is an exciting time for Beaumont House and means we can significantly increase our Hospice at Home service, allowing people in our communities to remain in familiar surroundings and maintain a comfortable quality of life in their final days.

"However, despite this new contract supporting our Hospice at Home service, we will still rely heavily on fundraising for the other services we offer. Hospice care isn't fully funded by the NHS, so we have to raise around £2.2m each year to cover the difference between our funding and our costs.

"Money raised through donations, our shops and support from local businesses will remain vital for us to continue

providing care and support to patients and their families when they need it most."

Richard Ball, head of system investments at Macmillan Cancer Support, added: "At the end of life, what matters most to people is comfort, dignity and being in a place that feels like home. This expansion of Beaumont House's Hospice at Home service will help ensure more people across North Nottinghamshire can be cared for in familiar surroundings, supported by skilled and compassionate teams who understand their needs.

"Backed by Macmillan's End of Life Care Fund and delivered through a sustainable social investment model, this partnership puts people and families first while helping to transform end of life care for local communities."

Dave Briggs, medical director at ICB, said: "Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB are delighted to have awarded this contract to Beaumont House! This is a key priority across our cluster, allowing the service to expand and enabling even more patients to die in their preferred place of care, offering personalised support during such important times."

● Beaumont House is now recruiting for a variety of positions prior to the new care service commencing in April 2026, to ensure it has the capacity to deliver the service and that growth is sustainable.

For information about vacancies and to apply, go to www.beaumonthouse.co.uk

To find out more about Beaumont House, visit www.beaumonthouse.co.uk or call 01636 610556.

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Reach out and make a difference as a volunteer

A CHARITY is appealing for people who would like to volunteer their time and talents to support adults with learning disabilities — including at its Mansfield base.

Reach Learning Disability said volunteers could make a real difference, helping someone build confidence, learn new skills, and feel more connected to their community.

At Reach Mansfield, based in St John's Centre, volunteers are needed to help at weekday sessions, from 10am to 12noon or 1pm to 3pm.

Volunteering manager **Wayne Wilmot** said: "You could support people to find their voice, help build digital confidence, or lend a hand in the kitchen.

"If you prefer to be active, there are fitness and dance courses, or you can get outdoors with the Green Taskforce."

There are also opportunities at other Reach centres. In Southwell, volunteers are needed to support weekly courses and to help at monthly Friday evening socials.

In Hawtonville, Flower Pod Newark hosts a monthly Saturday morning voice and participation group that needs volunteers to empower members to share their views and influence change.

All Reach centres would particularly welcome enquiries from cookery enthusiasts keen to help in fun weekly sessions as well as from potential volunteer van drivers.

One volunteer added: "I started volunteering with the charity with no experience — I just needed a new challenge.



WAYNE Wilmot (left), volunteering manager at Reach Learning Disability, with two of the clients at the charity's Flower Pod Southwell base.

"I wasn't sure if it would be for me, but I'm glad I started as I would have missed out on meeting so many lovely people. Even if you have a couple of hours to spare, they may be the best two hours of your week."

Reach said it was grateful to funders whose support is enhancing volunteering across the charity, including The National Lottery Community Fund (All Part of Change) and the UK Shared

Prosperity Fund/Mansfield District Council (Green Taskforce).

Wayne added: "Our volunteers make a real difference to the lives of local people with learning disabilities and their families. To find out more, please contact me for further information. I look forward to hearing from you!"

●Call 01636 819066, email wayne.wilmot@reachuk.org or go to www.reachuk.org for further information.

Foster parent urges others to make a difference

A LOCAL man who has already fostered four children on short-term placements is urging others to help more youngsters.

In January 2025 Dean contacted the Foster for East Midlands Councils Team and took his first step into fostering.

He attended training sessions and learned how to support children who may have had difficult experiences.

As the process continued, Dean felt increasingly confident that fostering was right for him.

Reflecting on this time, he said: "Everything just seemed to come together where I thought, yeah, I'd be good at this."

In August he was approved as a foster carer after attending a panel. Not long after, Dean welcomed his first foster child, an 18-month-old, for a 10-day stay.

"I don't think anybody can really prepare you. When the child arrives, you adapt to what they need," he said.

Since then, Dean has cared for four short-term placements, supporting children of different ages, from babies to teenagers.

Sometimes it can be hard to say goodbye, but Dean understands that helping a child move on safely means he has done his job well. He is also working closely with his social worker toward

a long-term placement, preparing to provide consistent care for a child who needs stability and support.

Dean enjoys supporting others who are thinking about fostering. He has helped at information events, sharing his own experience of the approval process and encouraging people to find out more.

●Go to <https://fosterforeastmidlands.org.uk> for further details.

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PRINCIPAL Emily Cook (bottom left), musical theatre lead Katie James (bottom right), Hykeham dance teacher Rob Pym (top left), Hykeham drama lead Hannah King (top right), and the 2026 cohort. PHOTO: Teresa Martin

Marking a decade of creativity at academy

STARLIGHT Theatre Academy is celebrating its 10-year anniversary this year, marking a decade of creativity, confidence building, and joyful chaos for hundreds of young performers across Newark and beyond.

Principal **Emily Cook** started the independent theatre school with just six students and a big idea.

Ten years on, the academy has grown into an established part of the local creative community, with more than 380 children and young people having come through its doors.

For many of them, Starlight has been about more than learning songs or scripts — it has been about finding confidence, friendship, and a space where they feel supported and encouraged to be themselves.

Emily said: “From the very beginning, we have believed that theatre should give every child a voice. That belief runs through everything we do and is reflected in our 18 productions to date.

“Every show has been written or adapted to ensure that every child has a speaking part, because no one should ever feel hidden at the back of the stage.

“Our most recent production, *Death Set Sail*, captured that ethos perfectly. Written by the students themselves, it was a musical murder mystery double feature that combined creativity, teamwork, and a

lot of laughter. It was a proud moment and a brilliant example of how we encourage young people to take ownership of their ideas and see them through from page to stage.”

Like many small arts organisations, the academy faced significant challenges during lockdown. Classes moved online when the young people created an original online musical, while Emily and her team did everything they could to keep its community connected.

Thanks to flexible, pay what you can pricing, the academy retained 100 per cent attendance throughout that period.

For many families, those weekly sessions became an important source of consistency and connection during an uncertain time.

Emily added: “Over the past decade, Starlight Theatre Academy has grown well beyond our own classes.

“We have delivered creative workshops and musical theatre after-school clubs in 10 local schools, with our longest running partnership now in its fifth year.

“Our holiday clubs have become a firm favourite, with 12 delivered so far, offering fun, creativity, and structure during school breaks.

“Our birthday parties have also become something of a local favourite, popping up everywhere from woodland clearings and back gardens to village halls, each one designed around the child at the centre of it.

“We have delivered workshops for local Brownie, Guide and Scout groups, helping even more young people discover the joy of performance in a relaxed and playful way.”

The academy took part in Fun Palace Newark in 2022, 2023, and 2024, supporting the idea that arts and culture should be

accessible to everyone. It has regular classes for children aged four to seven, and seven to 15 — also expanding to classes in North Hykeham.

More recently, the academy has introduced private LAMDA tuition, with students now working towards acting and musical theatre examinations.

Emily highlighted the progress of **Katie James**, one of its first students back in 2016, who is now musical theatre lead.

She is trained in choreography and currently works with performing arts school Addict.

Emily added: “Her journey reflects something we have always believed in at Starlight — training, nurturing, and genuinely looking after our own.

“As we celebrate 10 years of Starlight Theatre Academy, we are also looking ahead to an exciting year. Plans include a summer show, a Christmas show, an exciting pantomime, and a big 10th birthday party open to the public.

“Our anniversary showcase, *Spectacular*, takes place on 25th January, with term reopening shortly after and free taster sessions running on 31st January and 1st February 1st. Our Starlets classes for four to seven year-olds return on 28th February and 1st March, offering musical theatre and confidence building sessions for Key Stage 1 children.

“As always, our focus remains firmly on what we do best — creating welcoming spaces where children can grow in confidence, try new things, make friends, and discover just how capable they really are.”

●For more information about Starlight Theatre Academy, email info@starlighttheatreacademy.co.uk

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Charity appealing for half-marathon runners

BEAUMOND House Hospice Care has been named as the 2026 Partner Charity for the Newark Half Marathon — and applications to run for the charity are now open.

There are 40 charity places available to represent Beaumont House in the marathon, which will take place on Sunday, 16th August.

The entry fee for runners is £15, and Beaumont House is setting a fundraising target of £150 for each person taking part. Money raised will be used to help the hospice continue supporting patients and families

across Newark and Sherwood.

Caroline Swindin, head of Fundraising at Beaumont House Hospice Care, said: “We’re so grateful to have been named as Newark Half Marathon’s Partner Charity for 2026.

“Every step taken by our 40 supporters, plus others who will be running for us, will make a real difference as we help people in our local communities to live well and die well.

“Providing care and support to patients and their families costs us around £2.8m every year. This year, we will receive £555,000 of funding towards the cost of delivering our services, meaning that around £2.2m will still need to be raised.

“Without fundraisers like this, as well as support through our charity shops and local businesses, we could not continue to provide the care that

we do - it’s so important to us.

“We expect our charity places for the marathon to fill fast, so we encourage anybody who would like to get involved to sign up as soon as possible to avoid disappointment. We’ll look forward to seeing you all in action in August - and happy training!”

The Newark Half Marathon starts at Sconce and Devon Park in Newark, and follows a mostly flat, fast course suitable for beginners and seasoned runners alike.

●**To find out more and to sign up for a Beaumont House charity place, go to www.beaumonthouse.co.uk/newarkhalfmarathon**

To find out more about Beaumont House, go to www.beaumonthouse.co.uk or call 01636 610556 to speak to a member of the team.

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Talking mental health and wellbeing with students

MAGNUS Church of England Academy students welcomed **Tom Dickenson** from *Tom Talks*, a platform dedicated to raising awareness about mental health and education, for sessions focused on practical strategies for improving mental health and wellbeing, as well as the importance of making positive life choices.

Speaking to an assembly, and also smaller groups of students, Tom spoke openly about his own struggles after losing his 22-year-old brother to suicide in 2015.

He explained that living through that grief ultimately pushed him to support others with their mental health, sharing the insights he's gained along the way.

Tom said: "My aim is to raise awareness around mental health, and to encourage young people to talk to and support each other. Most of all, to understand that it is

okay not to be okay.

"I want young people to have the necessary tools, habits and systems — and the mindset they need to enable them to do whatever it is they want to achieve with their life."

Tom said he hoped that his experiences would be relatable, adding: "It is important to me because I lost my brother to suicide in 2015, and I quickly found myself in a very dark place.

"But I am lucky, I managed to get through to the other side. Following this struggle, a school in Sheffield asked me to speak to their students, which I eventually did in 2019, and that was the beginning of *Tom Talks*.

"When I did that, I felt like it was what I had been put here to do."

Tom said that by sharing the strategies he has developed, he hopes to help others who are struggling to navigate mental health issues.

"I really want to build resilience in young people, and to use my story to show that I have pulled myself back from the depths of despair, and that if I can do it, then others can too," he said.

"I am just a normal lad from Barnsley, and I think my message reaches students because of that. I hope it makes it easy for

them to relate to me and to gain something from my experience."

Georgia Andrews, pastoral support base manager and deputy DSL at Magnus, said Tom's visit was arranged after a local couple, moved by the tragic loss of their own son to suicide, offered to fund wellbeing sessions for students at Magnus.

"I am deeply grateful to **Jane Beardsley** and **Mark Gamble** for their powerful initiative to make conversations about mental health more accessible for all.

"When they approached me and shared their story of tragically losing their son to suicide, I was profoundly moved by their courage and their commitment to creating positive change.

Through their charity, Paul's Pit Stop, they have offered secondary schools the opportunity to host fully-funded assemblies and workshops delivered by *Tom Talks*, a passionate mental health advocate who speaks openly about his own journey and the loss of his brother to suicide.

"It is vital that our students hear the message that it is perfectly okay not to be okay. Tom's session has opened the door to more honest, compassionate conversations about mental health within our school community, and we are incredibly thankful for the impact it has already made."

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