

# CUSP II



CUMBRIA  
INNOVATIONS  
PLATFORM



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Acclaimed CUSP II tourism summit with TV commentator and journalist Simon Calder. From left Sarah Allison, CUSP II project manager, Dr Angela Anthonisz, University of Cumbria's principal tourism management lecturer, the university's Vice Chancellor Prof Julie Mennell, Simon Calder, Steve Woods, employer engagement manager at the university and Gill Haig, managing director Cumbria Tourism



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## CUSP II

### Project manager Sarah Allison

Celebrating the culmination of our three-year mission to break down barriers and springboard great ideas and products, we pay tribute to the county's remarkable SMEs for their determination to explore innovation and growth.

They have reached out and embraced the support of our very small and enthusiastic team of dedicated staff, students and academics for access to unique opportunities and over 6,000-hours of dedicated research.

We have built on the success of CUSP I in University of Cumbria's flagship initiative, part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund and in partnership with Lancaster University.

Thanks to this £5.7million growth booster, we have provided highly-skilled students and academic prowess to diverse enterprises across Cumbria to help take innovation forward.

Launching as Covid-19 took hold, we had to practice what we preached, depending on creativity and innovation to deliver research and development. As businesses and life stood still, CUSP II assisted those ready to seize new challenges, pivot operations and diversify.

In a county previously misrepresented as an innovation wilderness, we have seen new services and products launched and better ways of operating, reaping benefits for companies – and our economy.

We've guided smaller businesses who didn't have capacity to achieve their goals. It's with great pride that we now see them succeeding. Whether it was a new system, procedure or commodity, CUSP II has given much-needed expertise and guidance.

Bespoke support from our academics and other experts has been provided through knowledge exchange activities, including events, online development and the successful summit series, Cumbria Beyond 2025.

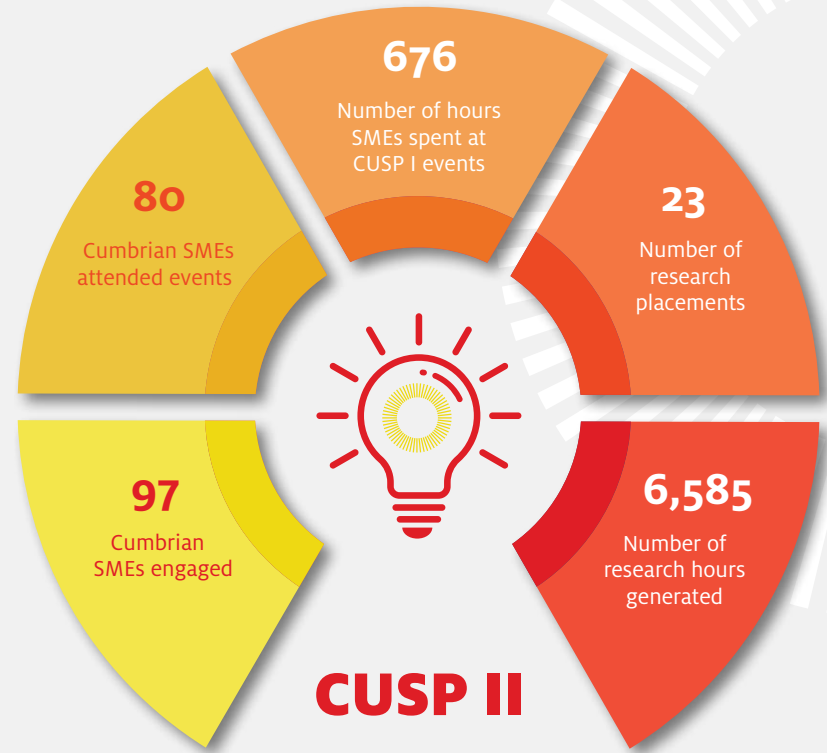
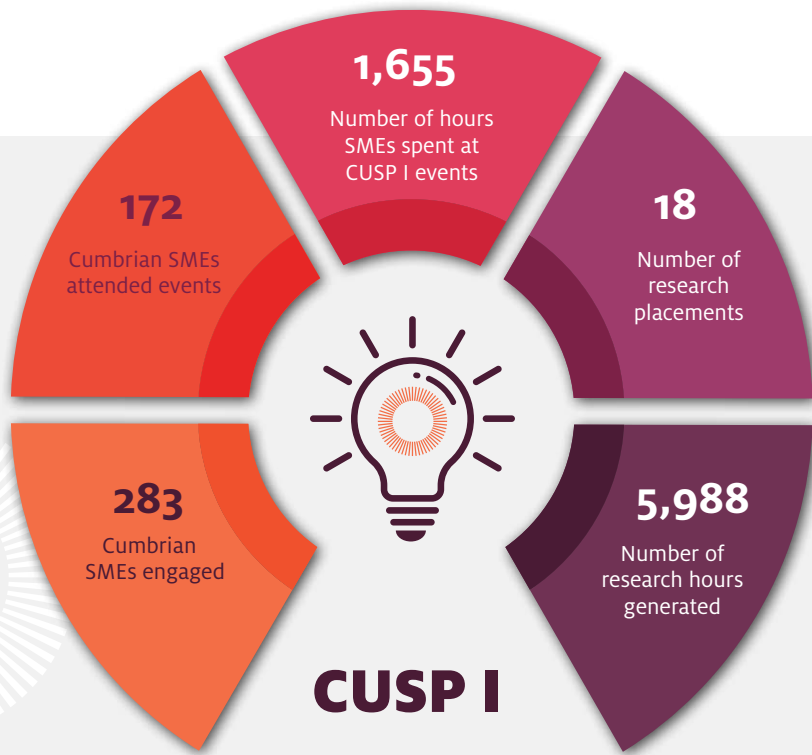
Harrison Network and Entrepreneur Business School have designed and delivered both online and in-person master classes and courses on every aspect of the innovation journey.

I am particularly indebted to University of Cumbria Innovation Fellow Dr Naomi Pierce's, who has worked with many of the businesses we are profiling. Her appraisals and deeper research interventions have been invaluable.

Raising the profile of innovative women through networking has seen significant contributions recognised and championed.

Our local business community is exceptional and has given us a deeper understanding of challenges and aspirations. As a result, we are better equipped to provide future support programmes for Cumbria.

Delivering CUSP II has been a pleasure and privilege.



# CUSP I & CUSP II



“My expectations were exceeded! I thought the format of igniters and discussions were brilliant.”



“I didn’t realise it would be so interactive. The number of attendees was great and the variation in types of businesses wonderful.”





“A great event with many innovation challenges identified and some good ideas and solutions to tackle them.”



“New connections and an insight to Cumbria. There’s a lot of really exciting stuff going on and passionate people with a range of skills.”





# GROUNDBREAKING ALGORITHMS SETTING CUMBRIA APART

**With its unique combination of landscape, culture and heritage, our county is one of the best-loved and busiest visitor hotspots in the UK.**



Hosting around 47 million annual holidaymakers and sightseers, Cumbria Tourism wanted to profile customers in a bid to help members amplify experiences and offers.

Turning to CUSP II for pioneering, innovative research, PhD student Delia Moisa set out to develop a digital platform for a more accurate profiling of visitors, using sector-based algorithms.

“Traditional demographics are inadequate as everyone is unique with different preferences, motives, desires, needs and wants,” explained Delia.

“This study will develop ways of looking at personality traits and motivations, rather than focusing on the more conventional methods using age and gender.”

Measuring personality using the Five Factor Model, a pilot study of 330 participants revealed significant relationships between character traits and visitor behaviour in Cumbria. A further exercise involving over 1,000 tourists is planned.

“You might assume older people prefer cultural activities, or that the young want adventures. I’m looking at it from a different perspective,” said Delia.

“Extraverts, irrespective of age, like being active. The open-minded enjoy visiting museums and art galleries, whether they’re 19 or 90. We see how this correlates with products and services.”

By using data and building algorithms, tools can be developed to set Cumbria apart, leading to dedicated offers for specific target audiences.

“Algorithms could constantly learn about visitor behaviour, allowing for instantly accessible insights,” added Delia.

“The mission is to create world-class experiences through sustainable tourism, and this will help, benefitting the region and tourists. It’s early days, but I’ve already had very positive feedback.”





“We are very grateful to CUSP II for funding Delia’s research that could potentially be groundbreaking in how we approach visitor segmentation in this digital age.”

Sue Clarke, marketing manager, Cumbria Tourism



**PhD researcher**  
**Delia Moisa**

**Project**

Developing an innovative digital solution for a deeper understanding of visitor behaviour.



# WONDER OF WOOL IN NEW YARN PRODUCT RANGES

**Deep-rooted in its sense of place, OUBAS set out to make positive ripples with its exclusive high-end and locally made knitwear.**



“We wanted to create something slow, a Cumbrian alternative to the vast global fashion industry,” explained founder Kate Stalker. “Forging a closer relationship between consumer and clothing label is what we’re after, creating a greater personal connection.”

“OUBAS makes to order from merino, cashmere and organic cotton. We have a small-batch production on all our ranges, made in my home town of Ulverston. Our items are cherished, kept and looked-after for a long time.”

“The vision is to build something that has a positive and lasting effect on employment and the skills associated with our wools and knitwear.”

Connecting with CUSP II at a women’s networking event, Kate saw the possibilities for innovation following a move to her current workshop. With new machinery and opportunities, she was keen to look at the use of British native fibres in men’s and home wear.

“I didn’t want to be in a niche where I wasn’t looking at increasing British wool potential, customer pull and connection,” said Kate. “Also, how could I be more creative and innovative with my machinery and products?”

“These are questions I couldn’t possibly answer, but CUSP II’s research will take us to another level. It will help educate about natural fibres and sustainable fashion, communicating what we’re doing to wider audiences.”

“We want to reach out locally too, with a focus on valuing our local heritage.”

OUBAS has been handcrafting exclusive wool knitwear since 2012, starting in a small spare room and moving into its current open studio and workshops two years ago.

“It’s amazing! We couldn’t have done this ourselves. It’s going to strengthen our understanding, improve our marketing strategy and give us a lot more focus going forward to innovate in the best possible way.”

Kate Stalker, OUBUS Natural Knitwear

Kate Stalker, Oubas



**Intern**  
**Chiao-Han Chang**

**Project**

Supporting the development of new product ranges utilising British yarns with Cumbrian designs.



# STOP CLOTHING COSTING THE EARTH

**Whitehaven clothing retailer Rebecca Lyall is a woman on a mission – to develop the country’s first dedicated textile recycling plant in West Cumbria.**



The owner of Eco.Lure and lifelong environmental campaigner says fashion is one of the world’s biggest polluters and is determined to close a ‘senseless loop’. Currently, used garments are sent to third world countries, ostensibly for recycling, but most end up in landfill.

“My customers return clothes when they’re finished with them for discounts on new products, but I can’t say with any certainty where they will go when I recycle them,” explained Rebecca. “Having a plant here would change everything. It’s more than a pipedream, it has to happen.

“CUSP II is giving me the research I need to make people listen and have confidence in what I’m suggesting. My intern Klaudia Uryniuk is doing wonderful work in assessing attitudes to textile recycling and looking at current options for dealing with this waste.”

Research will highlight how much recycled fabric is utilised in the UK, its main markets and how products are promoted - crucial evidence for a much-needed service in Cumbria.

As for Rebecca, she is intent on seeing a far-reaching sustainable site established in an area of high unemployment that would reflect the natural environment. Her blueprint would bring workers unique opportunities – right down to making the most of daylight and growing salad leaves for lunch.

She added: “We have to make bold steps towards proper textile recycling plants in the UK. I want to show what could be achieved. With CUSP II’s support, I’m hopeful there is light at the end of the tunnel.”



Rebecca Lyall

“It would have taken me at least 10 years to get close to what CUSP II has done and, even then, there would have been no certainty that the project could have gone forward.”

Rebecca Lyall, Eco.Lure



**Intern**  
Klaudia Uryniuk

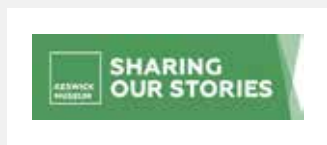
**Project**

Exploring the development of a new and innovative clothes recycling operation for West Cumbria.



# BOXED UP POETS IN PUPIL PULL

**Award-winning Keswick Museum wanted an innovative twist to its far-reaching vision linking the world-renowned Lakes' Romanticism movement with schools, taking poets directly to pupils.**



With around 20,000 objects in its care and the capacity to display only five to 10 percent at any one time, it was decided to 'box up' a subject and deliver it directly to the classroom.

"To make our collection more accessible to wider audiences, we are developing education programmes," explained curator, Nicola Lawson. "We wanted a focus on the landscapes, nature and human interactions which inspired our literary greats.

"It's not always easy for schools to come to us, so we decided to go to them and thanks to CUSP II intern Meghann Hillier-Broadley we are doing just that."

Keswick-based Robert Southey, Poet Laureate and prominent member of the Romantic movement, was an obvious choice for a pilot lesson plan, delivered in a Meghann devised loan box to enthusiastic audiences.

"This isn't about dusty old papers, it's bringing a subject to life," said Nicola. "Meghann even created a water soundscape for Southey's famous Cataract of Lodore. It helps give kids the chance to respond creatively in the same way he did to the landscape around him."

With one successful box under its belt, there are plans for more. Delving into the museum's rich repository, the scope goes well beyond a school teaching tool. Interactive learning and opportunities can open doors - and loan boxes - anywhere and for anyone.

As the museum sees a transition from past to future and a change in emphasis to being a centre for skills development, Nicola said CUSP II's role had been fantastic.



Claire Grant, Keswick Museum

“ We’re a small team and could never have delivered a project like this without Meghann. Schools really love what she’s done and it’s going to make a big difference to our future outreach work.”

Nicola Lawson, curator Keswick Museum



Intern  
Meghann Hillier-Broadley

Project  
Creating new opportunities for learning through the development of an innovative learning experience.



Director Gary Martin

# AMBITIOUS GOALS SET TO BE ACHIEVED

**There's no resting on laurels for one of Cumbria's biggest IT providers - David Allen IT Solutions is committed to achieving substantial growth.**



'We knew we were at the cutting-edge of technology, but there is always an opportunity to do more,' explained Director Gary Martin.

With a staff of 25 professionals and operating from bases across Cumbria and southwest Scotland, diverse support systems are provided to a raft of leading businesses and charities with a pledge 'we do much more than just keeping the lights on'.

While supporting clients in tackling their challenges and reaching goals, the company is dedicated to achieving aspirations of its own – to expand into the northeast.

Reaching out to CUSP II to help study a new geographic area, as well as assessing the offer from other local and nationally managed service providers, has been key in far-reaching plans to embrace a new region.

"It's a massive region with some fantastic business that we have never approached," said Gary. "Thanks to this innovative research, we are now active in increasing our profile and have ambitious expansion plans.

"Cumbria Innovation Platform has allowed us to take a step back and see an exciting way forward."

Working with top legal practices, agricultural suppliers, manufacturers, engineering companies and many more, the company currently provides IT solutions for around 150 enterprises.

Gary added: "Investigating how other providers operate, not just here, but in London, Manchester and Newcastle, has also been invaluable. We wanted to learn to see what more we could do. Having the right solutions and products for our clients is paramount."



“Intern Laurie Eastburn has given us the impetus to go into new areas with more vigour and urgency, helping us to develop for the benefit of our clients.”

Gary Martin, David Allen IT Solutions



**Intern**  
**Laurie Eastburn**

**Project**

Driving forward service innovation to meet the needs of ever-changing demands in a highly competitive industry.





# WOOL SPIN-OFFS WEAVING FLEECE OPPORTUNITIES

**With an end to agriculture’s Basic Payment Scheme in sight, Sharon and Chris Hodgson knew they had to investigate other revenue streams for Rydal Farm, near Ambleside.**



A new building for cattle had freed-up a beautiful old Lakeland stone barn and when it was cleared for a ceilidh to celebrate Chris’s 50th birthday, friends and neighbours were smitten, declaring it ‘the perfect venue’.

“We went for Barn in the Fells having decided to use the building predominantly for weddings, but look at ways of generating income during the winter months,” explained Sharon.

“The farm has around 1,300 sheep, which amounts to a lot of wool, but we get virtually nothing for it. Our fleeces are essentially waste. We wanted to look at the sort of products they could be turned into for a potential new venture.”

It was just the sort of project CUSP II was able to help with and intern Julia Wingertszahn set about investigating the options, which included insulation, clothing, dog beds, felt items for wedding favours and bunting.

“I could have done the research myself, but didn’t have the time,” added Sharon. “Julia’s input in product development and marketing has been very impressive.”

“We are now looking at collaborating with other businesses who may have the processing capability and/or a production facility and hope to link with a Lake District tweed maker to see if we can work together.”

The Hodgson family has been at Rydal Farm since the 1940s and are keen this new enterprise should be innovative and sustainable for future generations. It should also support the wider local economy, safeguard the environment and protect the surrounding landscape, explained Sharon.



“I am very grateful for the opportunities CUSP II and our intern Julia have brought. It’s really made me think about the circular economy and the benefits of trying to join two businesses together.”

**Sharon Hodgson, Barn in the Fells**



**Intern**  
**Julia Wingertszahn**

**Project**

Turning excess wool from 1,300 sheep into innovative products and gifts for discerning brides and grooms.



# BREATH OF FRESH AIR FOR OUTSIDE NURSERY

**Kids love to be alfresco and whether they're playing, climbing, running or splashing about there is no doubt that open air fun is very good for them.**

However, there are no fully outdoor nurseries in North Cumbria, which is why Neil Northman has firm plans to establish the first green venue of its kind in the area, to boost health and learning in equal measure.

In Scraffle and Scrow he wants to see children understand and care for the natural world and is appealing to landowners for a suitable space to take concept to reality.

"The nursery would be environmentally friendly in every sense," explained Neil. "We aim to have a yurt with woodburning stove and composting toilet, with future possible additions of fruit, vegetable and wildflower growing areas.

"Our young people would be fully involved, encouraging an early love of nature and the countryside. Alongside this, we would like to set up a charity for lower income households to access high-quality nursery settings, including ours."

With the search on for a suitable site in north Cumbria, CUSP II stepped in to evaluate existing nursery provision in the area, assess current waiting lists and test the plan's viability. Also studied were unique selling points in the proposal.

"We wanted to understand the best way to grow and this was an innovative and fantastic opportunity to harness potential and knowledge," said Neil.

"We've always wanted to work with local communities and support and create something that could be a model of innovation. This offers so much to our young people, going way beyond fresh air, vitamin D and opportunities to explore and learn.

"Proven to improve wellbeing and concentration levels, being outside allows children to take in the world around them. We want to create fun and deep connections – for each other and the planet."

“Intern Clare Bowman has researched comparisons and competition, contrasted paedology and been a great source of conversation to help develop ideas. Thanks CUSP II!”

Neil Northman, Wholesome Nurseries



Intern  
Clare Bowman

**Project**

Developing an innovative style of outdoor learning for young children.



# LADS' NIGHT MISSION FINDING ITS FEET

**Statistics surrounding young men in Cumbria make grim reading, with health and life expectancy below national averages.**



So when Dan Alexander, of Carlisle's iCan Health & Fitness, decided to use his own experiences to develop a Lads' Night initiative for 16 to 24 year-olds, no-one doubted its value.

However, when it came to funding a weekly support group, the wellbeing co-ordinator hit a wall, until CUSP II intern, Felicity Griggs, stepped into the frame to provide much-needed innovation-led research.

"I had the biggest crisis of my life when I hit 30 and was diagnosed with depression and anxiety," explained Dan. "Everything in my life had to change. Exercise became the big thing, running, hiking, getting myself fit.

"Knowing how it helped me get my life back, I wanted to use the experience to reach out to others and the group was formed to bring support for young males with mental and physical health issues.

"We're early on in the process. Felicity's knowledge and expertise is going to make a big difference, not just for funding, but in

understanding the demographic of this age-group, underpinning the need for this new service."

The aim is to offer informal 'relax and reach out sessions' three times a month and on the fourth week organise activities, with funding coming from Cumbria Community Foundation.

Lads' Night will operate under the banner WeCan, formed to help combat what Dan explained was a lack of appropriate provision across Cumbria for young men experiencing mental health challenges.

"We know this group is at risk on a number of fronts. Hospital admissions, suicide rates, levels of anxiety and low happiness are all of concern," he said.

"It's not hard to identify the need for what we're proposing and with CUSP II behind us, we'll be in a much better position to get financial backing and recognition."

“I didn’t realise the potential until I spoke to Felicity and heard her ideas of the kind of research that would be pulled together. It’s innovative and fantastic!”

Dan Alexander, co-ordinator for Lads’ Night



**Intern**  
Felicity Griggs

**Project**  
Innovation for health and wellbeing with a new service aimed at supporting the vulnerable in North Cumbria.



Nicola Myers, Fruit & Veg Box Co

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

**Passionate advocate of fresh fruit and veg, Nicola Myers grew up eating what her dad produced in his garden and went on to establish her own successful supply company.**



Faced with kids knowing almost nothing about where their food came from, the Silloth entrepreneur behind Fruit & Veg Box Co decided to take matters into her own hands and set about establishing an online learning platform to promote healthy eating.

Piloting a half price produce box scheme at two schools, there were virtually no takers at a town centre primary. In a more affluent rural area, one boy, used to eating fresh, cellophane-wrapped, supermarket sliced pineapple, was not able to identify the real thing.

“There’s a whole generation of children knowing nothing about how food is grown, what to do with vegetables or the importance of eating healthily,” said Nicola.

“And it’s not just kids. I had stalls in Cumbrian hospitals. One woman refused to buy potatoes after a paper bag split and soiled spuds fell out. She’d no idea they’d come from the ground in the first place, not thinking beyond her usual washed, plastic-wrapped purchases.”

Having masterminded the Fruit & Veg Box Co Education System for Healthy Kids, Nicola promoted her programme to schools and youth groups, even developing an award scheme. But without proper funding or expertise, her vision floundered – until CUSP II threw her an innovation helpline.

“I’d like to give special thanks to intern Mohamed Al Mutawakel. His technical support in creating an interactive learning platform for schools and community groups has been absolutely amazing,” she said.

“We’re now creating age-specific material for website uploads after investigations showed 92 percent of Apps were used only once and not suitable for what we wanted to do.”



“Eating fruit and veg should be simple and learning about them ought to be included in the school curriculum, along with recycling and carbon reduction. Too many people just don’t care. Thanks to CUSP’s innovation, we hope to make a difference”

Nicola Myers, Fruit & Veg Box Co.



#### Intern

Mohamed Al Mutawakel

#### Project

Creating an innovative digital platform to encourage and educate children on the merits of healthy eating.



# SMALL WINS SPELL VISITOR GAINS

**With worldwide fans paying homage to Wordsworth’s beloved Rydal family home, the bard’s great-great-great-great grandson decided to investigate if the visitor experience could be bolstered.**



Christopher Wordsworth Andrew decided CUSP II might just offer a solution to probing what the renowned house and grounds offered and if improvements could be made to enhance experiences, services and products.

“The result has been absolutely fantastic with our master’s degree intern Lynne Singleton making a massive contribution, mainly through small, but very meaningful innovative steps,” he explained.

One simple solution centred around staff wearing lanyards so they could be easily identified and approached. Both they and visitors are appreciating this subtle approach to being visible – for a cost of just £10.

“Introducing the signage that Lynne has suggested, guiding people to reception, toilets, house and grounds has also cut out a lot of confusion,” said Christopher.

“As we live here, we take so many things for granted and it took someone else to see where beneficial alterations could be made.

These may be small wins, but they are worthwhile. More substantial recommendations are under consideration.”

Suggestions that rooms in the house, where Wordsworth penned some of his most celebrated works, should have a more authentic feel might be a longer-term project. However, CUSP II has prompted the concept of inspirational poetry readings triggered by QR codes on visitor phones.

“Extending our tearoom into a garage below was something we’d never considered, but another great idea,” said Christopher.

“From the beginning of April until October, we are in the thick of it and it’s almost impossible to think beyond the tasks in hand. For someone to come in with an impartial, innovative overview has been very helpful.

“Part of the exercise was to look at what other Lake District open houses were offering and compare their offer with ours. Seeing where we fared better – and worse – was invaluable.”

“We were looking for small wins, but have gained so much more from CUSP II’s timely interventions which will have a very positive impact on our visitor experience.”

Christopher Wordsworth Andrew, Rydal Mount



MBA researcher  
Lynne Singleton

### Project

Extending the visitor season and enhancing the experience with product and service innovation.



Sharron Lewis, Carer Support South Lakes

# MAJOR OVERHAUL FOR VITAL INFORMATION PLATFORM

**Carer Support South Lakes (CSSL) is a lifeline to nearly 2,000 unpaid adults and children and says three out of five of us will, at some point, need to look after a family member or friend.**



In its 30-plus years, the charity has gathered important information on subjects as diverse as dementia, autism, alcohol dependence and domestic abuse. Currently 29 individual groups have access to crucial online data.

The 24/7 support platform, Carer Connect, has become a massive, but increasingly unwieldy and under-utilised resource in desperate need of major overhaul.

In asking CUSP II to bring innovation and solutions, CSSL was mindful it also needed to find substantial sums of money to meet its 2023 £200,000 fundraising target. Representing a whopping 300 percent increase on the previous year, advertising through Carer Connect was an option which needed urgent investigation.

“There is a pressing need for expertise to do a deep dive to find ways of streamlining and expanding information,” explained business development manager, Marian Graveson. “We know the potential is there, but only fresh eyes and new approaches can find it.

“In each of the areas we work in, there is a lot to get across, everything from financial advice to health and wellbeing, support systems, legal explanations, even community events. It’s all there, but Carer Connect remains unseen and unused by many.

“We want to make it accessible and relevant. Caring for someone can be very isolating, particularly for those who suddenly and unexpectedly find themselves in the role. This digital platform is there for them, even in the middle of the night. With CUSP II’s innovation expertise, we’ll make it work.”

“Carer Connect is undeveloped and under-utilised. People are not coming to the site. We need support in getting it to where it needs to be, CUSP II is providing it.”

Marian Graveson, business development manager Carer Support South Lakes



**Intern**  
**Mahwesh Durrani**

**Project**  
Innovative digital solutions for a vital carer support service in South Lakes.

University of Cumbria's Towards 2030 strategy sets out priorities and ambition with an emphasis on academic and applied research to accelerate and increase nationally and internationally exported expertise.



University of  
**CUMBRIA**

**Our Vision: transforming lives and livelihoods through learning, applied research and practice – for now and for our future generations.**

**Our Mission: inspiring and equipping our graduates, communities, economy, and environment to thrive.**



# CUSP II

BOOSTING ECONOMIC GROWTH IN CUMBRIA



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