



Welcome

It is with great pride that I present this year's Annual Report for Rainbow Services. Over the past year, we have continued to make a significant and lasting impact within the Harlow community. Through our diverse projects, we have been addressing the pressing issues of disadvantage, deprivation, and social exclusion. Our work is aimed at empowering individuals, supporting local organisations, and nurturing a more resilient community.

The challenges we've faced over the past year could easily be seen as daunting. Competition for grants has become increasingly fierce, and the available funds are more limited than ever. However, we choose to focus on the positives. Under the strong leadership of Sharon and our dedicated high-performing team, we have successfully secured funding for both new and ongoing projects. The majority of our projects you'll read about in this report have been funded using a full-cost recovery model, ensuring sustainability and thorough resourcing.

That said, we remain committed to exploring new avenues for financial sustainability. Diversifying our income streams has been a priority, and we continue to investigate opportunities to secure funding through contracts rather than relying solely on grants. This approach not only strengthens our financial position but also reinforces our reputation for quality and effectiveness, which is the foundation of our success in bidding for new opportunities.

Rainbow Services is proud to be a Harlow-focused charity. Our mission is to design and deliver projects that address gaps in the local voluntary sector, ensuring that no one in our community is left behind.

From supporting voluntary organisations through infrastructure services to directly engaging with the community via special projects like the Youth Project and the Community Hub, our goal remains the same—to foster a thriving, inclusive environment where everyone has the chance to succeed.

Looking ahead, we remain optimistic about the future. The work we do is more than just a response to the challenges we face—it's about building a stronger, more united community. Together, with your support and collaboration, we can continue to drive meaningful change in Harlow, ensuring a brighter future for all.

Thank you for being a part of our journey.

Nishall Garala
Chair



We are so incredibly lucky at Rainbow Services to have a fantastic team of staff and volunteers. Every day they go above and beyond to help individuals and families in Harlow, and I would like to send a huge heartfelt thank you to each and every one of them. Their passion, commitment, and professionalism are what make Rainbow Services the success that it is, and I am incredibly proud to work with all of them.

I also want to thank our wonderful funders, both statutory and non-statutory, without their support none of the work detailed in this report would have been possible. Thank you!

We have an amazing voluntary sector in Harlow, full of hardworking, wonderfully caring people who spend their lives helping others. We are proud of the part we play in this as the local infrastructure support service, supporting organisations to thrive, and helping to leverage large amounts of investment into Harlow, such as the Sport England work, we have recently embarked upon.

Throughout the year we have worked hard on making Rainbow Services as financially sustainable as possible, as we face unprecedented pressures on funding, with record levels of applications for each fund, and the number of funding opportunities declining.

Despite this, our projects have continued to develop and grow, and we are now reaching over 5000 individual beneficiaries and households each year. People across Harlow come to us for support with everything from education, to cost of living, to health, to loneliness, to family support, to volunteering, to help running a not-for-profit organisation, to cooking healthy food on a budget,

to help with learning maths....the list goes on and on. We support, enable, and empower people to find their own solutions to the problems they face as a result of poverty and deprivation. I am incredibly proud of the full community wrap-around service we provide, and the crossover between projects which support the whole person and family, not just individual problems. This leads to a far greater sustainable impact.

I am also really pleased that this year we have been able to start to offer our own staff valuable developmental opportunities through apprenticeships, by taking advantage of the apprenticeship levy, thanks to Harlow Council. It is really important to me that we give our team the opportunity to develop and grow along with the organisation so that we can achieve our vision together.

We are all very proud of what has been achieved this year, and once again I would like to thank everyone who helped make that possible.

Sharon Summerfield
CEO





VOLUNTARY SECTOR SUPPORT

Supporting voluntary and community organisations in Harlow

Rainbow Services supports voluntary and community organisations within Harlow through a range of infrastructure services and practical facilities, including:

- The Rainbow Centre: Office space, hot desking, meeting room hire, PAT testing and Disclosure and Barring Services, plus reception and postal address services.
- Advice and Guidance: Free and unlimited one-to-one guidance on everything from governance to funding.
- Representation: Representing the sector on over 50 regular forums.
- Ebulletin: Free weekly bulletin containing local and national news, funding opportunities and access to workshops and training.
- Voluntary Sector Forum: Quarterly networking for the voluntary sector to meet, hear from relevant speakers, and share information with colleagues from all sectors.

Despite challenges around funding, we have continued to help new organisations set up during this year and supported many other organisations with guidance and advice.

Our quarterly Voluntary Sector Forums continue to be popular events giving our affiliates the opportunity to network with community organisations, and to meet with statutory organisations and businesses. We also hold these forums in locations of interest to the sector, for example this year they were held at; Harlow Town Park, Harlow Education Consortium, and Maybury Open Door. Speed networking is always popular!



In August, we held our annual Voluntary Sector Event, a free public-facing event in the Watergardens in Harlow, allowing Harlow residents to see what voluntary sector services are available locally. It was a fantastic day, the weather was kind and feedback from other organisations and the public was very positive!

 **99**
voluntary
sector groups
supported

**More than
200**
hours of free
consultancy



 **192**
DBS checks
carried out



COMMUNITY BUILDER

Reducing loneliness and social isolation for Harlow Seniors

Now a team of five, the Community Builder Project grows year on year. As well as the twenty-six clubs running every week across Harlow we have also put on over 26 trips and events. These include The Great Get Together, a family fun day in Harlow's beautiful Town Park, our Safe and Socials with speakers in the morning, such as Harlow Police to ensure people are safe from scams, a Fish and Chip lunch, and live entertainment in the afternoon. Then there is Silver Sunday, a national day of celebration for older people, our afternoon teas, a trip to Broadstairs and a trip to Southend. We also had a week of canal cruises on the River Stort, a Christmas Market, and three Christmas Parties. Phew!



We continue to run our programme of strength-based exercises fondly known as Fitness Fun and Friends along with our other weekly clubs. We have our monthly singing group with Goldies at The Playhouse and our volunteer John runs our monthly Tech Support group at Morris House.

It has opened a new world for me I have met several new friends and very caring volunteers and Rainbow staff. To sum it up Rainbow is like seeing a Rainbow appear on a dismal dreary day to brighten up your life.

We started our Natures Choices group, which meets every Monday in the Walled Garden of the Town Park. It offers a Dementia Friendly space to be creative with crafts, raised beds for those with green-fingers, or a stroll around the Park or Pets Corner.

We said a massive thank you to our volunteers with a celebration. The awesome team won Harlow Town Centre Award 2023 for Volunteers of the Year. This project would not be the success that it is without them!



 **1194**
beneficiaries

56
volunteers



 **24**
weekly
clubs

26
day trips
and events





OUR HEALTH MATTERS

Empowering people to improve their quality of life and well being

Our Health Matters continues to grow, and it has been a busy year. NHS England have certainly secured value for money from this project, and as a direct result of this project we have seen the biggest leap forward in addressing health inequalities that we have ever seen in the town.

We have recruited volunteers with lived experiences of long-term health conditions and experience of the inequalities faced by them and their communities.

Using funding received from Active Essex, we started a weekly Singing for Lung Health group. The instructor was recommended by Asthma UK and we now have 15 regular attendees.

The Our Health Matters project has many successful partnerships including the diabetes outreach service, the Dementia team and memory clinic staff, Pact for Autism, United in Kind and the neurodiverse community. Our work with these organisations enables us to assist communities, such as the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller community, helping them to meaningfully engage with many local services that they would not have otherwise engaged with.

Our partnership with the ICB around the Cancel out Cancer project has meant that diverse communities in the area have accessed information and health screening, ultimately leading to cancer prevention.

Through our research on diabetes and the menopause we are now setting up groups in Harlow for people to attend to share their experiences and offer support to each other.

As the project continues to gain momentum, it is clear that we are only just beginning to 'scratch the surface' of support required. Our Health Matters is being recognised as a service that can deliver on its promises, and thankfully we have received funding to continue the project and engage further with communities, ensuring that the trust we have built within vulnerable communities remains strong.

it's so nice to be finally listened to



 **25**
group sessions

8
events 

 **14**
community connectors



COMMUNITY HUB

Crisis help and community and health information for Harlow

Our Community Hub is a partnership project between Rainbow Services, Citizens Advice Harlow and Harlow Foodbank. We offer a range of services for all Harlow residents affected by crisis situations, as well as information on community and social activities, energy efficiency, access to volunteering and health screening.

Partnerships

This year we continued our mutually beneficial working relationship with Synthomer. Their staff generously donated over 80 Easter Eggs which we distributed to vulnerable families and an enormous number of Christmas gifts for our very own Santa Claus to hand out at our Christmas party.

*Thanks as ever – the hub is just incredible. With every good wish,
Cllr Dan Swords
Leader of Harlow Council*

Via Harlow Creates and the Royal Opera House we received 480 craft boxes which were distributed to families over the summer via craft sessions. A great time was had by all, and every child took away a free Hobbycraft box to enable them to get crafty at home.

Special Projects

Working in partnership with Community Energy South, the team received training on the Government's Home Upgrade Grant (HUG2) programme, which fully funds low carbon interventions. Funding received from Community Energy South allowed us to carry out community engagement work promoting the scheme and directly targeting eligible households.

The staff were brilliant, very helpful and always checking on you if you needed anything.



Thanks to funding from Active Essex, we carried out more cooking workshops. Participants enjoyed learning to cook new dishes and received a cooking appliance, recipe book, vouchers and a short workshop from Citizens Advice Harlow on budgeting and energy saving.

Using funding received from the Household Support Fund, Winter Warmth and Food Support funds we have been able to provide support to residents by giving out winter warmth packs, items to help with energy efficiency and cooking packs.

After receiving training from the ICB, the team have put a lot of focus on promotion of health checks, Healthy Start Vouchers and health screening.



 **1442**
unique households reached

475
Citizens Advice cases 

 **2181**
Foodbank vouchers issued



YOUTH PROJECT

Practical skills and Gateway qualifications for young people

The Youth Project works with young people who have disengaged from school. Our youth workers support young people in our purpose-built carpentry workshop in Harlow, helping them gain qualifications while re-engaging them with positive role models, community activities, and education. We receive referrals from Essex Youth Services, Essex Youth Offending Team, Essex Police, schools, and parents.

Rainbow Services became a Gateway Qualification Centre this year, and can now provide a range of Gateway qualifications to our young people.

Our impact this year includes:

- 94% of our young people reporting developed skills,
- 75% wanting to take part in their community,
- 72% of our young people feeling more confident,
- 64% staying away from criminal activity,
- 59% improvement in positive wellbeing and skills scores.

We show young people that there is an alternative to joining gangs, we show them a better way to earn money and feel a sense of belonging,

In the last twelve months 103 young people have been supported through mentoring into positive activities including: apprenticeships with local companies, further education at Harlow College, Essex Fire & Rescue Fire Breaks, Police cadets, community activity, work experience opportunities, and work placements.

We ran three Firebreaks with Essex Fire and Rescue for 24 young people, who spent the week learning essential life skills as part of firefighter training. 15 of the young people went on to be offered fire cadets places.

We also took groups on an activity week to Wales. An important trip for learning a huge range of skills, from teamwork to empathy to resilience.

Our young people were part of the ECVYS youth safety listening project, the results of which are being used to influence funders and policymakers.

Our community programme teaches project management skills for self-employment. Proposed projects are put before a panel of eight young people, who then choose the projects and, over twelve weeks, cost, design, and build them for the community group. This year the young people have built projects including; accessible planters for Harlow College, Alice in Wonderland themed area and Mud Kitchen for Plant Pots & Wellies and planters for Princess Alexandra Hospital.

Taking part in the Youth Project has really boosted my confidence. I was very quiet in school and lacked any motivation to learn. Now, I am a mentor to other students and work closely with some of the new referrals. I have so much more confidence in myself all thanks to Jason and the Youth Project team.



178 young people worked with

75

young people gaining 2 Gateway qualifications



8 community projects built



RAINBOW FAMILY CONTACT CENTRE

Establishing or re-establishing contact between a child and their family through supported contact

Through our Family Contact Centre we offer a helping hand, providing a safe, neutral and fun place for the children of separated families to enjoy contact with a non-resident parent and/or other family member. Our sessions run once a week on a Saturday morning, at the Meadows Family Hub - a fully equipped centre with toys and games for all ages.

Our services are free of charge, ensuring that children are not disadvantaged because parents are unable to pay. To be able to do this we rely on the work of our amazing volunteers, and we've been very lucky to be joined by several new volunteers this year, meaning we have been able to move from bi-weekly to weekly opening. Because of this, we are starting to see more families join us, and we are now progressing with our application for the centre to become National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC) accredited.

In December, John Sisk & Son, a company working locally, donated some beautiful handmade toys including a rocking horse, chair, xylophone, and two freestanding activity boards to the Family Contact Centre. The families have put these to great use!

"I thoroughly enjoy volunteering. Helping to give non-resident parents the opportunity to establish a good loving relationship with their children is so important as it allows families to reconnect safely."



36 parents and children supported

WECAN
west essex community action network



As well as our own work, Rainbow Services works in a consortium with our two neighbouring CVSs – Voluntary Action Epping Forest and CVS Uttlesford (UCAN). This consortium is called West Essex Community Action Network (WECAN) and delivers high-level statutory ideas at a local level, across West Essex.

Our projects during the year include:

Find Your Active: led by Rainbow Services, an Essex wide initiative funded by Active Essex to promote physical activity across West Essex. WECAN employs one member of staff who works in the community on a one-to-one basis supporting people into physical activity. This could be anything from a short walk to a marathon.

Digital Inclusion: Funded by the NHS Charities Fund, led by CVS Uttlesford. As the name suggests, the aim is to improve the life chances of those who would benefit from a greater ability to use technology or who might

be in danger of becoming isolated or marginalised by not being able to use it to access services.

Mental Health Discharge: Providing support and signposting to people who have been receiving residential mental health services and are ready to be discharged. This project, led by Voluntary Action Epping Forest supports the reintegration of discharged patients into their home and community through signposting to local interventions.

Bereavement Support: A project run by Voluntary Action Epping Forest, providing practical and emotional support for those suffering the effects of bereavement. Services include regular 1:1 support, as well as group sessions both face to face and online. The service can be accessed by adults, young people, and children.

In 2025 UCAN took the decision to leave WECAN to pursue its own goals, so the Digital Inclusion project is now run by VAEF.

Accounts

RAINBOW SERVICES (HARLOW)

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES INCLUDING INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

Current financial year					
	Notes	Unrestricted funds 2024 £	Restricted funds 2024 £	Total 2024 £	Total 2023 £
Income from:					
Donations and legacies	3	1,008	21,591	22,599	28,771
Charitable activities	4	77,235	432,184	509,419	467,832
Other trading activities	5	35,588	4,140	39,728	56,327
Investments	6	5,586	-	5,586	912
Total income		119,417	457,915	577,332	553,842
Expenditure on:					
Charitable activities	7	72,749	401,975	474,724	504,761
Total expenditure		72,749	401,975	474,724	504,761
Net income before investment gains/(losses)		46,668	55,940	102,608	49,081
Net gains/(losses) on investments	10	15,551	-	15,551	(2,344)
Net movement in funds		62,219	55,940	118,159	46,737
Fund balances at 1 April 2023		269,348	36,023	305,371	258,634
Fund balances at 31 March 2024		331,567	91,963	423,530	305,371

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year.

All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

The statement of financial activities also complies with the requirements for an income and expenditure account under the Companies Act 2006.

ACCOUNTS

Trustee Statement

These summarised financial statements contain information from both the Statement of Financial Activities and the Balance Sheet for the year ended 31st March 2024, but are not the full statutory report and accounts. The full financial statements were approved by the Trustees on the 17th of September 2024 and subsequently submitted to the Charity Commission and to Companies House. The company is exempt from audit under Section 477 of the Companies Act 2006. The accounts were independently examined. The full annual accounts, including the Trustee Annual Report, can be obtained from the charity's head office.

Nishall Garala

Nishall Garala
Chair of Rainbow Services

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rainbow Services would like to publicly thank our funders, investors, all of the generous individual donors, our Rainbow Trustees, our amazing volunteers, all of the users of our services, organisational supporters, Harlow VSF members and participants, Harlow Council, Essex County Council, the staff at the Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB, and our fellow infrastructure providers across Essex.

Rainbow Services major funders





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