

Welcome

It is a privilege to present this year's Annual Report again for Rainbow Services. Since 1999, Rainbow Services has remained committed to addressing disadvantage, deprivation, and social exclusion in Harlow and the surrounding areas. We continue to deliver imaginative, community-led projects that empower individuals, strengthen organisations, and foster meaningful change.

This year has been marked by growth, innovation, and collaboration. Our work through the Community Hub, in partnership with Citizens Advice Harlow and Harlow Foodbank, has expanded significantly. With over 300 outreach sessions and support provided to more than 1450 households, the team has worked tirelessly to meet complex needs across the town.

Our involvement in Sport England's Place Partnership Expansion programme has been a significant development. Through grassroots engagement, we've connected with over a thousand residents to understand barriers to physical activity, particularly among those with additional needs. The Pedal Power initiative, which has already provided over 40 bikes to eligible residents, is helping to address transport-related challenges and promote healthier lifestyles.

We were also proud to host our first Prom Event, offering free formalwear to young people who might otherwise miss out due to financial constraints. The event was a resounding success and highlighted the environmental benefits of reusing pre-loved garments.



Rainbow Services is incredibly lucky to have a fantastic team of staff and volunteers. Every day they go above and beyond to support

our community, 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 be part of the "Rainbow Family" with 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!

Securing funding has continued to be our biggest challenge this year, and we continue to represent our sector, working with funders to show the value of more meaningful, longer-term funding, which doesn't increase costs but does provide greater impact for beneficiaries. There is a long way still to go, but people are listening, and we will continue to bang that drum!

Our Youth Project continues to make a meaningful difference for young people in Harlow. Delivered through a hands-on carpentry course, it provides practical skills, accredited qualifications, and a supportive environment that helps participants build confidence, stay engaged, and explore positive pathways. The project plays a vital role in preventing disengagement and promoting personal development.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our staff, volunteers, and partners. Their commitment to supporting the community, often in challenging circumstances, is the foundation of everything we do. Thank you to all of them for making Rainbow Services what it is today.

Rainbow Services remains a trusted and dynamic force for good in Harlow. As Chair, I am proud to support this work and look forward to the opportunities ahead.

Nishall Garala
Chair

Despite the nature of current funding, our projects have continued to develop and grow, as we have worked hard to make Rainbow Services as sustainable as we can, and we are now reaching well over 6000 individual beneficiaries and households each year. We are offering support with everything from education, to financial crisis, 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 providing prom outfits, the list goes on and on, as we continue to deliver on our mission to alleviate the effects of poverty and deprivation.

I am incredibly proud of the full community wrap-around service we provide, and the cross-over between projects which support the whole person and family, not just individual problems. This leads to a far greater sustainable impact and more resilient communities.

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 support 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 setting up an organisation to governance to funding.
- **Representation:** Representing the sector on over 50 regular Boards and Groups.
- **Newsletter:** Free weekly newsletter containing information relevant to the voluntary sector, such as funding opportunities, what's on, 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, and having to use our own reserves, we have continued to offer infrastructure support across Harlow, as we believe a strong voluntary sector is the best way to build resilient communities, which are less reliant on statutory services, and thus deliver on our mission to alleviate the effects of poverty and deprivation.

Just a quick thank you for today's speed networking event. It was most useful and I met many new people from voluntary and community groups, it was good to see so many new faces.

Our quarterly Voluntary Sector Forums continue to be popular events, allowing our affiliates to network with other community organisations as well as statutory organisations and local businesses. 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!



257
voluntary
sector groups
supported

47
newsletters



5
networking
events



COMMUNITY BUILDER

Reducing loneliness and social isolation for Harlow Seniors



Our Community Builder project aims to reduce loneliness and social isolation for older people in Harlow.

With our new Senior Officer, we are now a team of seven. We are small but mighty and continue to work tirelessly to support our older people.



With all the clubs, events and trips, we try to cater to everyone's needs and listen to what our beneficiaries want. From our Safe & Socials to Silver Sunday, afternoon teas, and trips to the seaside. Southend is always a popular request and we enjoyed Knebworth Christmas Market and four, yes four, Christmas Parties! as well as a few trips up and down the River Stort.

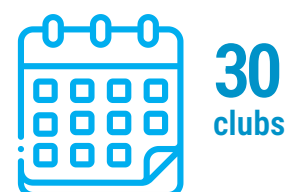
Our Fitness Fun and Friends programme, which provides assisted exercise to help prevent trips and falls, is just as popular as ever, and we have started a second weekly session with funding from Sport England at Great Parndon Library. People can exercise whilst seated, standing supported, or just standing, and the session is always followed by tea and a chat.

I really enjoyed the Christmas dinner, it was hot and lovely, and the singer Scott Elvis was excellent entertainment, who could go wrong with Elvis songs... You are amazing people. All the hard work you all did to give us old uns! A proper Christmas... It is appreciated.

We continue to run our monthly Tech Support group, Goldies singing group, and Dementia Friendly activities such as Nature's Choices which continues to grow in the beautiful Walled Garden in our Town Park.

This year, we held our first Caring Together, Learning Together Conference. A day for carers, professionals, family, and friends of those living with dementia, along with anyone else who wanted to know more about dementia and what we can all do to help. Guest speakers included Alzheimer's Society, Dementia UK, Action for Family Carers, Citizens Advice, EPUT, Dementia Adventure and a local Funeral Director.

Our fantastic volunteers also won the Harlow Town Centre Award 2024 for Volunteers of the Year for the second year running!



OUR HEALTH MATTERS

Empowering people to improve their quality of life and well being



Our Health Matters aims to reduce health inequalities and has continued to grow at pace.

We secured funding from The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust to continue offering Singing for Lung Health free of charge for another year. Participants consistently report benefits such as improved breathing, fewer infections, and reduced hospital visits.

We hosted support groups for Diabetes and Menopause, sharing practical advice on nutrition and empowering attendees to engage more effectively with their GPs. Our partnership with Healthwatch Essex enabled four sessions focused on men's health, encouraging open conversations and social connection.

Mental health and neurodiversity were the most discussed topics this year. We supported individuals through tailored advice and signposting and collaborated on a project exploring the experiences of women with multiple long-term conditions, offering further support where needed.

Through our work with Speak Out Essex, we held workshops that brought together diverse communities to share their experiences with Autism. Insights from these sessions were shared with Essex County Council to inform future support.

We also partnered with the Gypsy Roma Traveller community, attending neurodiversity-focused drop-ins for parents and children, continuing to provide guidance and resources.

In collaboration with the ICB and other organisations, we contributed to developing a mental health and well-being strategy, with a focus on adapting support for those with neurodiverse needs. We explored how loneliness and isolation impact mental health and how these issues interconnect.

Alongside these partnerships, we continue to work directly with individuals, empowering them to make informed health choices through accessible information and ongoing support.



I've not had a hospital admission in over a year, and this is all down to singing every week





COMMUNITY HUB

Crisis help and community and health information for Harlow

Our Community Hub Project aims to support people in crisis, both with immediate emergency support and longer-term assistance to prevent future crises.

The work carried out by the Community Hub team, which includes our partners Citizens Advice Harlow and Harlow Foodbank, continues to grow and evolve and we are proud of what we continue to achieve, often working with complex cases.

The team carry out an average of 6 outreach sessions per week where we 'pop-up' in various venues across the town to engage with a diverse group of people. We also operate a telephone line five days per week.

This year, we have run multiple additional special projects, including our first Prom event, which was delivered with support from NEST. Many of the families we work with had told us their young people were missing out on school proms because they simply couldn't afford outfits to wear to them, so it was lovely to be able to do something to help with that.

We asked for donations of formal wear and accessories, and put on an event where young people could come and choose a special outfit at no cost, to wear to their school prom. The project also highlighted the positive environmental impact of reusing pre-loved garments.

Our cook and eat programme, Kelly & Kate's Kitchen, has been running successfully for a few years now and continues to thrive. This year it has continued thanks to funding from Active Essex and Harlow Creates. Participants learn how to cook healthy dishes, learn energy saving and budgeting tips from Citizens Advice Harlow, take away cooking appliances and make new social connections. This year we were excited to add a new element to some of the sessions with the arrival of our Cook, Eat, Create programme. Attendees on these sessions learnt how to cook simple budget friendly, healthy dishes and were introduced to a creative activity too.

Thanks to funding from the Active Essex Winter Experience fund, we were able to put on a bumper Christmas Party for families we have worked with. We were joined by a brilliant entertainer, and our guests enjoyed an amazing festive-themed feast.

"I live on a narrow boat and you kindly helped when I was struggling, and you gave me a winter warmth pack, SIM card and food vouchers. Thank you very much!"

Each family took away a festive hamper, and all the children met Santa and received a gift. Gifts were generously donated by Synthomer, Colas and via the Essex Police gift appeal. We welcomed 47 families (approximately 150 people).

Over Christmas, we worked with The Hill Group to support their first Kindness Day in Harlow, and at Easter, we partnered with these companies again to provide Easter Eggs to the families we support.

 **1470**
unique households reached

312
outreach sessions 

 **2411**
vouchers issued to alleviate food poverty



YOUTH PROJECT

Practical skills and Gateway qualifications for young people

The Youth Project accepts referrals of at-risk young people from schools, Essex Youth Services, Essex Police, Essex Fire & Rescue, self-referrals and many other agencies. This year we have seen a 40% increase in referrals.

We have continued to deliver the Youth Project in our carpentry workshop five days per week, offering two Gateway Qualifications—health and safety in construction, and carpentry hand tools. This provides young people with a clear aim and focus and proved very successful with all the young people who have achieved their qualifications with some of them going on to gain their CSCS cards, enrol at Harlow College and even start jobs in the construction industry.

The Youth Project has been packed with many special projects this year, from our first all-female Fire Break course to watching a group of young people push their limits by gorge walking on an Essex Boys & Girls Club residential in Maes y Ladeon in Wales.

"Thank you for partnering with us in serving the community around the Gateway Hub. The young people were friendly and polite and it was great to see how committed they are to what they do"

We were greatly honoured to receive an award by the High Sheriff of Essex, David Hurst, in recognition of great and valuable service to the community.

We would like to particularly mention the Gangs and County Lines Workshop which was made possible through funding from the Safer Harlow Partnership. Rainbow Services collaborated with Essex Youth Service, Essex Police, Harlow Council and St Giles Trust to deliver awareness raising sessions at Harlow Playhouse for young people, professionals, parents and carers on county lines, knife crime and gangs.

The event aimed to raise awareness and understanding of youth violence issues and help young people, education providers, parents and carers recognise the signs of criminal exploitation and who they can talk to if they have any concerns.

100% of attendees said they gained a better understanding of county lines and the relationship between county lines and other forms of criminal activity.

The knowledge and expertise of the Youth Project team is also being acknowledged across Essex. We were invited to run a workshop on criminal exploitation, county lines and knife crime at the Youth Voice Day. Attendees took part in activities, had an opportunity to ask questions and hear from a member of the team about their lived experience.

Finally, we were invited by MP Chris Vince to visit Parliament with a group of young people. The group took part in a guided tour and had the opportunity to watch a live debate. A memorable day for everyone!



 **254**
young people worked with

72
young people gaining 2 Gateway qualifications 

 **18** 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 each week on a Saturday morning, at the Meadows Family Hub (who kindly provide their building for free) – 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.

In the Summer we had to find an alternative venue for the Family Contact Centre due to building works at the Meadows. We were very grateful to Harlow Council who allowed us to use the Leah Manning Centre at no cost.

Paringdon Pirates and another local social club kindly donated money to the project which enabled us to purchase new toys and a new pool table for the families to enjoy during their supported contact sessions.

This year we were successful in our application to become a National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC) accredited centre.



25
parents and
children
supported

You have been such a support to the family, and my daughter absolutely loves coming here.



WECAN PROJECTS

Delivering high-level statutory ideas at a local level, across West Essex through partnership working

As well as our own work, Rainbow Services is part of a consortium with our neighbouring CVS – Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF). This consortium is called West Essex Community Action Network (WECAN) and delivers high-level statutory ideas at a local level, across West Essex, through partnership working.

WECAN projects are led by either Rainbow Services or VAEF, depending on expertise, geography, and capacity. 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:** Led by VAEF, the aim is to improve life outcomes for 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.

- **Bereavement Support:** Led by VAEF, 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.
- **Hospital Discharge Support:** Led by Rainbow Services, providing support for residents of West Essex being discharged from Princess Alexandra and Whipps Cross Hospitals. We provide services such as deep cleaning and decluttering homes to ensure they are safe to return to, moving furniture to accommodate medical equipment, hot meal delivery, key safe installations, and anything else that is preventing the safe return home of the patient. We then provide welfare calls to the patient over a six week period to help ensure they can remain independent at home and prevent hospital readmission.

For further information on WECAN and our projects, please visit the WECAN website at westessexcan.org



PEDAL POWER

Empowering families and individuals to improve their mental and physical health through cycling

Rainbow Services is delighted to be involved in the Place Partnership Expansion (PPE) programme, which has been launched by Sport England. The PPE programme seeks to provide positive experiences for Harlow residents, increase physical activity, tackle inactivity, and remove barriers that prevent residents from being more physically active.

The current development phase of this programme is a crucial opportunity to gather data and identify needs, so that together with partners, Active Essex, and Harlow Council, we can develop a strategy to tackle the barriers people face to moving more and improving their health and wellbeing.

Since September, we have engaged directly with over 1,000 Harlow residents to uncover the real barriers to physical activity, particularly among those with Special Educational Needs and Neurodiversity. We have visited schools, coffee mornings, shops, local services and even a car wash, enabling us to build trust and gather powerful insights.

In collaboration with partners, Harlow residents have been connected to inclusive opportunities, and we have



championed national campaigns like Let's Dance. We've been involved with activities such as co-leading workshops for over-50s to advancing knowledge in autism and inclusive sport.

The biggest test and learn for this project so far is Pedal Power. Through Essex Pedal Power we offer free bike loans to eligible individuals, including families, job seekers, and those with long-term health conditions, who face transport-related barriers. If used regularly, the bike becomes theirs to keep. With GPS tracking in place, the project is gathering valuable data on adult bike usage to measure impact and inform future planning."



OUR WONDERFUL VOLUNTEERS

The people who help make Rainbow projects happen

We want to say a massive thank you to all our volunteers. Without their unwavering support, our projects would not be the successes that they are.

Our 75 plus volunteers are a friendly, welcoming face at our clubs and events. They give their time each week to prepare and run activities, provide refreshments and a listening ear. They mentor our young people - some of them are young mentors, mentoring their younger peers, they set up events, stands, carry out PAT testing and cover reception. The list goes on and on, and we would be lost without them!

Rev Crispin White was a guiding light during the formation and launch of Rainbow Services, 26 years ago. When Crispin retired from being our chair, the Trustee Board thought long and hard for a way to commemorate and celebrate his involvement - and so the Crispin White award for Voluntary Endeavour was born!

This year The Crispin White Award goes to Dan McIntyre and Simon Pankhurst.



Dan

Simon

Dan has volunteered with our Community Hub since 2022, when he helped deliver essential items such as beds etc to our beneficiaries. He is our go-to fetcher/carryer/dropper off and is always happy to help set up and pack down at events.

Simon has quickly become an indispensable member of the Youth Project team. His energy and positivity have had a lasting impact on the young people we work with. He is dedicated and provides invaluable support, guiding the young people through their qualifications.

Thank you to all our wonderful volunteers!

Accounts

RAINBOW SERVICES (HARLOW)

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES INCLUDING INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

	Notes	Unrestricted funds 2025 £	Restricted funds 2025 £	Total 2025 £	Unrestricted funds 2024 £	Restricted funds 2024 £	Total 2024 £
Income from:							
Donations and legacies	3	1,843	41,621	43,464	1,008	21,591	22,599
Charitable activities	4	52,332	512,015	564,347	77,931	432,324	510,255
Other trading activities	5	62,809	5,133	67,942	34,892	4,000	38,892
Investments	6	8,494	-	8,494	5,586	-	5,586
Total income		125,478	558,769	684,247	119,417	457,915	577,332
Expenditure on:							
Charitable activities	7	106,094	527,765	633,859	72,749	401,975	474,724
Total expenditure		106,094	527,765	633,859	72,749	401,975	474,724
Net gains/(losses) on investments							
	11	(1,955)	-	(1,955)	15,551	-	15,551
Net income and movement in funds							
		17,429	31,004	48,433	62,219	55,940	118,159
Reconciliation of funds:							
Fund balances at 1 April 2024		331,567	91,963	423,530	269,348	36,023	305,371
Fund balances at 31 March 2025		348,996	122,967	471,963	331,567	91,963	423,530

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year. All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

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 2025, but are not the full statutory report and accounts. The full financial statements were approved by the Trustees on the 5th of October 2025 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 Services Trustees, our amazing volunteers, all of the users of our services, organisational supporters, our voluntary sector partners, affiliates and colleagues, Harlow Council, Essex County Council, the Herts and West Essex ICB, and our fellow infrastructure providers across Essex.

Rainbow Services’ major funders











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