



Annual Impact Report

2024/25

Registered Charity Number: 1088411
Companies House Number: 4198889

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Chair's Report


As I reflect on another year as Chair, it reminds me of the quote by Mother Teresa: **“I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot, together we can do great things.”**

This reflects the commitment of the whole team, led by our CEO, Varsha Parmar, to consistently deliver high-quality work. While each project leader has shared more detail throughout this report, a few highlights are worth mentioning:

EmpowHER, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, has just completed its first year and received overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants. Vita Minds (NHS Talking Therapies) has had a significant impact on participants' mental health and wellbeing. Now in its fourth year, the project continues to thrive thanks to the creativity and energy of the team. We look forward to the final year and hope for continued funding.

Our social media platforms, managed by our Marketing and Communications Officer, have played a key role in sharing our impact and keeping our community updated.

Annual events like the Loughborough Mela and our Public Lecture continue to be important milestones. Planning is already underway for 2026, with next year's lecture set to explore the impact of social media on young people in our communities.



The work of Equality Action is ongoing, as many in our communities continue to face challenges with the cost of living, health, housing, benefits, and immigration. None of our efforts would be possible without the continued support of our funders and our strategic partnership with Charnwood Borough Council. Thank you for trusting us.

As I step down as Chair, I want to sincerely thank my fellow Board members for their time and commitment, and the staff and CEO for their openness and support. It's been a valuable and rewarding experience. I also warmly welcome the new Chair and Trustees, I'm confident they'll bring fresh ideas and energy to take Equality Action forward.

“Together we can do great things”

- **Geetha Bala**, Chair

Treasurer's Report

This year has been focused on consolidating our accounting processes and refining how we report on individual projects. Matthew and I have become more efficient in managing these tasks, including processing the monthly payroll.

Financially, Equality Action is in a stable position, with healthy reserves. That said, additional funding, particularly to support our casework, would make a real difference.

Looking ahead, one priority will be to explore how we can increase donations to the charity, whether through fundraising efforts or making better use of our website's giving options.

- **Rachel Thorpe**, Treasurer

Chief Executive Officer's Report



Rising living costs, growing mental health needs and limited healthcare access continue to affect the people we support. More individuals are turning to us, many struggling to manage rising energy and food bills, with real impacts on their wellbeing. Our caseworkers and project officers continue to provide vital, hands-on support.

We're grateful to our funders, partners and supporters. Strong collaboration is key in times like these. We also recognise the emotional toll on staff and have continued regular wellbeing sessions, delivered in-house thanks to our project officer Zee.

Internally, we've digitalised casework files to boost efficiency and meet GDPR requirements, thanks to Mazim Rahman for leading this. We've also reinforced governance with a new succession plan.

Our website has been fully redesigned, thanks to Toni, our Comms Officer, and Ash Edmondson and the Jacit team (see page 19 for details).

We remain committed to supporting staff, trustees and volunteers through training and space to connect. Casework funding remains a challenge, so we thank all our funders, past and present, for helping us keep this work going. And to our team and partners, thank you.

- **Varsha Parmar**, CEO

Mission, Values & Aims

We work towards a fairer, more inclusive society. We focus on breaking down everyday barriers that stop people from getting help, being heard or feeling like they belong.

Our Values

Respect

We create safe, welcoming spaces where everyone is treated with dignity and listened to.

Integrity

We're honest, transparent and take responsibility for the work we do and the decisions we make.

Teamwork

We work with staff, trustees and our community. We're stronger when we work together.

Dedication

We care about our work. Our team is driven by a desire to improve lives and challenge inequality.

Inclusion

We work to remove barriers and make sure our services are accessible to everyone.

Our Aims

- Support people from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Tackle discrimination and challenge unfair systems
- Improve access to health, education and basic services
- Build stronger links across communities
- Help families improve wellbeing and resilience
- Make sure people feel safe, supported and empowered

Partnerships & Collaborations



Working in partnership is vital to how we deliver our services.

When specialist support is needed, we rely on trusted organisations to help meet those needs. As a strategic partner of Charnwood Borough Council, we maintain strong links with key stakeholders across the borough through regular meetings and shared initiatives.

We're also grateful for our local partnership with Tesco Community Champions at The Rushes, whose continued support helps us reach more people.

Recently, we hosted a visit from local MP Jeevun Sandher and the Lloyds Bank Foundation team, a valuable opportunity to highlight the challenges faced by our communities and the increasing demand for our services.

Strong relationships with local networks and national funders allow us to connect grassroots voices with mainstream services, helping shape more inclusive, responsive support.

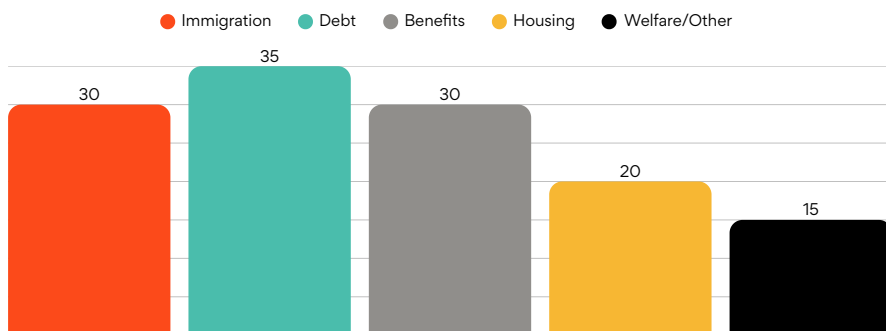


Casework

Casework remains a key reason people turn to us. Rising living costs, mental health struggles and limited access to healthcare services continue to affect many individuals and families.

We've seen more people needing help, especially those overwhelmed by energy bills, food prices and other essentials, impacting both mental and physical health.

Our caseworkers and project officers offer tailored support every day. On average we deal with 30 appointments a week.



Casework

Overview

Immigration

From 10 February 2025, new Home Office rules mean British Citizenship (Naturalisation) can be refused if someone:

- Entered the UK illegally, or
- Arrived without permission after a dangerous journey (e.g. by small boat or hidden in a vehicle)

This applies regardless of how long they've lived here or how well they've settled.

Housing

The housing crisis is getting worse. More people are stuck in overcrowded, poor-quality or temporary housing, with long waits for social homes. These conditions are damaging mental health and family life.

Private rents have soared, making them unaffordable for many and offering little stability. Urgent action is needed:

- More affordable and social housing
- Better regulation of private renting
- Stronger support for those at risk of homelessness

Issues We've Seen First-Hand

- Older migrants struggling with online-only services
- Poor advice on Windrush applications
- Confusion around dual citizenship and consular processes
- A lack of in-person help for vulnerable residents





Casework

Case Study - Mrs P's Story

Mrs P, aged 82, has lived in the UK for over 65 years since arriving from India on a spouse visa and receiving Indefinite Leave to Remain. Despite being settled for decades, recent changes to immigration systems caused her significant stress.

New rules now require foreign passport holders to register for an e-visa, a fully digital process involving online forms, app-based ID checks, or biometric appointments. For older people with limited English or digital access, this can be overwhelming.

Mrs P was mistakenly advised to apply under the Windrush scheme, which didn't apply to her. Anxious and confused, she visited Equality Action. Our officer quickly identified the correct process, helped her register for the e-visa and booked a local biometric appointment.

She also needed to renew her Indian passport, but the High Commission now requires a share code from the UKVI system, adding another layer of stress. Widowed for seven years and reluctant to rely on her children, she was grateful for our help: "My husband used to deal with all of this. My children help, but they're far away and busy with work and family. I'm very grateful Equality Action is here to support people like us."

Mrs P is now successfully registered and ready to renew her passport, with peace of mind restored.



Casework

Case Study - Mr K's Story

Mr K, a Greek national, has lived in the UK for over 50 years. Like many long-term residents, he didn't realise he needed to apply for the EU Settlement Scheme.

After being signposted by Citizens Advice, he came to Equality Action for help. We supported him through the application, which was successful. Mr K can now continue living in the UK with peace of mind that his status is secure.

Case Study - Mr Y's Story

Mr Y, a Syrian national with refugee status, came to us for help with his Personal Independence Payment (PIP) application. During the appointment, he shared how his health affects his daily life, and also opened up about traumatic experiences in Syria that were impacting his mental health.

Our Project Officer explained the support available through NHS Talking Therapies. With his consent, a referral was made.

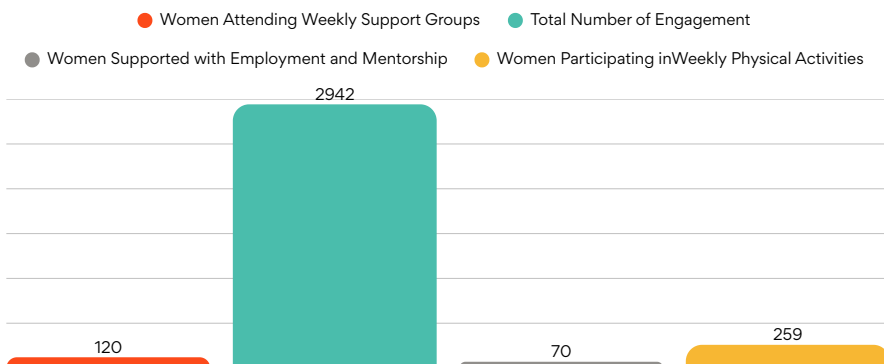
Thank you to our amazing caseworkers, Chayara, Amina and Kazi, for all their diligent work.

EmpowHER

Funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, EmpowHER supports women in our community through weekly activities and one-to-one support, offering a safe space to grow and connect.

Weekly Activities

- Walking Group: Relaxed outdoor walks with conversation and light exercise.
- Sewing & Crafts: Creative sessions to learn, share, and socialise.
- Swimming: Private, inclusive sessions to boost confidence and wellbeing.
- Befriending Group: A space to talk and connect.



EmpowHER

Project Highlights



Netball Group

Our community netball group has become a standout success. With around 40 registered players, it brings together women and girls of all ages to play, connect and support one another.

Participants have taken on organising roles, hosted a community tournament and raised money for charity.

Women's Economic Empowerment

EmpowHER also helps women explore career opportunities:

- CV Writing – **22 women supported**
- Application Support – **27 women supported**
- Interview Preparation – **35 women supported**
- Outcomes: **15 women gained employment** and **2 women** launched small businesses in tailoring and care work.

Working With Local Services

EmpowHER is also a space where researchers and professionals connect with women to understand community needs and improve services. Workshops have been delivered in collaboration with Loughborough University and the University of Leicester, covering topics like local health provision and menopause awareness.

- **3 workshops with Loughborough University** – 35 participants
- **2 workshops with University of Leicester** – 18 participants

The project continues to help build stronger links between service providers and the community, encouraging more inclusive and accessible support.



EmpowHER

Case Study - Mrs S' Story

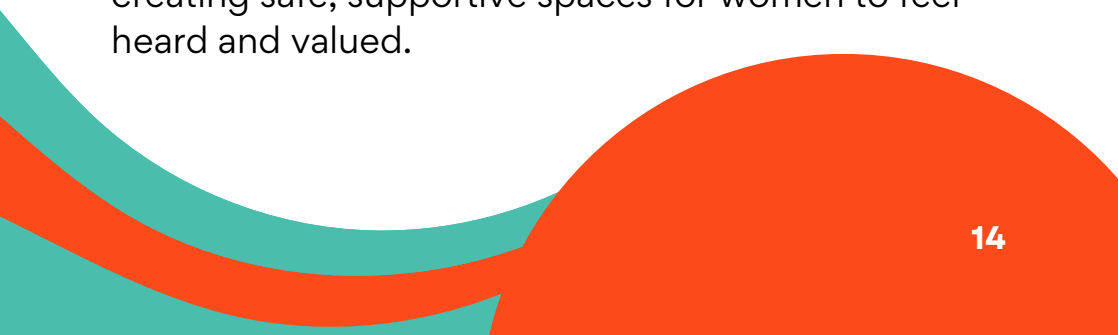
At 30, Mrs S had built a career in education. But when her son was diagnosed with a rare illness, she left her job to care for him full-time. Though she was fully focused on his needs, she began to feel isolated, low in confidence and disconnected from her sense of self.

She was introduced to the EmpowHER project by another woman and, though unsure at first, joined a befriending group. There, she found connection and support from women who understood what she was going through.

Week by week, she joined more activities, slowly rebuilding her confidence and sense of belonging. Our project officer recognised her natural people skills and education background, encouraging her to lead small group discussions. With support and training, she began helping others, and rediscovered her own strengths.

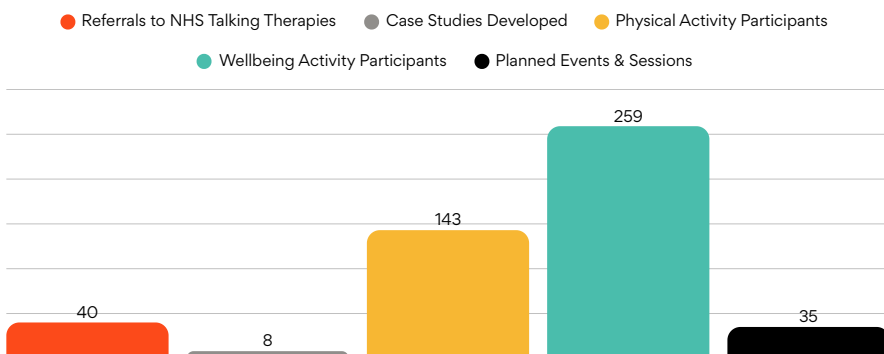
She also took part in walking, exercise and mindfulness sessions, giving herself time to de-stress and focus on her own wellbeing again. Today, Mrs S is a core part of the EmpowHER community.

Thank you to our amazing project officer, Minara, for creating safe, supportive spaces for women to feel heard and valued.



NHS Talking Therapies

Funded by Vita Health Group, this five-year project launched in 2021 and focuses on delivering NHS Talking Therapies across Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland (LLR). These services provide therapies for depression and anxiety and support adults aged 16+ in accessing community support and well-being resources.



NHS Talking Therapies

Case Study - Mrs I's Story



In November 2024, Mrs I was referred to NHS Talking Therapies with high stress and anxiety. She was caring for her undiagnosed autistic son, had recently been diagnosed with Poly Cystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS), and couldn't work due to childcare barriers. With no local support and her family in Bangladesh, she felt isolated and unsure about engaging with therapy.

Through our project, Mrs I began one-to-one coaching with our project officer. These sessions helped her feel heard and supported, and gave her a clearer understanding of CBT, which helped her engage more fully with it.

They also worked on practical steps towards employment, including creating a CV that boosted her confidence and reminded her of her strengths. As she gained confidence, Mrs I successfully pushed for PCOS treatment, completed her therapy, and took on a voluntary role at a local school, with the potential for future paid work.

Now feeling more empowered, she's better able to support both herself and her son.

“When I first saw you at Wesley Hall, I was feeling down and unsure about my future. You listened to me patiently and gave me helpful suggestions. You supported me in so many ways, including helping me create a CV, something I really needed. I'm truly grateful for your support.”

NHS Talking Therapies



Case Study - Mr S' Story

Mr S, a support worker living in Leicester, met our project officer at a local health event in Wigston. During a quiet chat, he opened up about his teenage daughter, who had been struggling emotionally since the family's recent move from India. She was being bullied at school, which had knocked her confidence and affected both her studies and motivation.

Mr S felt overwhelmed and blamed himself, unsure of where to turn for help. The project officer provided a supportive space to talk. They introduced him to NHS Talking Therapies and explained how the service could support both him and his daughter with their mental health.

With step-by-step guidance, the officer helped Mr S complete the self-referral process. Encouraged by the support, both he and his daughter are now actively engaged in therapy.

Mr S later shared that the sessions have made a noticeable difference, his daughter is feeling more confident, and he feels less stressed and more hopeful. This case highlights the importance of bridging the gap between local families and mental health services.

NHS Talking Therapies

Quotes from Our Beneficiaries

"Without you coming out to see us at these events, no one would acknowledge us."

- R at Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre

"A calm safe space that allowed me to stop and be."

- M at The Community Space John Lewis

"Very calm and relaxing session. Mindful art is amazing. Love, love, love. Just needed to get out after 6 weeks..."

- A at Spinney Hill Support Services

"I found this emotional debriefing very beneficial. I felt a sense of relief and peace in my heart."

- B at Shama Women's Centre

Thank you to our amazing project officers, Mehraj, Chayara and Zee, for offering a lifeline to so many.



Communications & Marketing Report



2025 has been a year of real progress for Equality Action's communications. Since joining the team, my focus has been on three key areas: modernising our digital presence, strengthening our branding and improving how we share our impact.

A major milestone was launching our new website. It's now clearer, easier to use, and reflects who we are, with updated service info, more photography and regular news updates. With tracking tools now in place, we've seen a steady rise in visitors, most of them new, showing our reach is growing.

We've also focused on brand consistency. From leaflets to name badges and digital templates, everything now reflects a more cohesive and professional identity.

Highlights this year included promoting our Annual Lecture and producing all supporting materials. Our social media channels have grown steadily too, especially when we share people-focused stories and local partnerships.

With the 2026 Public Lecture and Mela already in motion, I'm excited to keep building on this work, raising awareness in ways that are real, engaging and rooted in community.

- **Antoaneta Blagoeva**, Marketing & Communications Officer

Annual Public Lecture 2025

Community – After the Riots
Speaker: Baroness Ruth Lister



In February, we hosted our Annual Public Lecture at Loughborough University, an evening of thoughtful discussion on how communities can rebuild and strengthen after times of unrest. This year's theme was to define 'community', why it matters and how do we embrace difference.

We were honoured to welcome Baroness Ruth Lister CBE FBA FAcSS as our keynote speaker. Ruth is Emeritus Professor of Social Policy at Loughborough University and a Labour member of the House of Lords. Her work on poverty, citizenship and inequality is widely respected, and she holds several voluntary roles.

The evening concluded with a lively Q&A panel featuring:

- Dr Jeevun Sandher, MP for Loughborough and economist
- Richard Herrick, Immigration Policy Officer, EMC
- Helen Carter, CEO, Loughborough Wellbeing Centre
- Veronica Moore, Director of EDI, Loughborough University

Their openness and expertise sparked a dynamic conversation. Thanks to our team, volunteers and the staff at the university for helping the evening run so smoothly and to everyone who joined us. Planning is already underway for our 2026 Lecture, we look forward to welcoming you next February!



Loughborough Mela 2025

A Celebration of Culture, Community and Unity

Loughborough Mela 2025 was another vibrant and successful event, held on 10th August in the heart of Loughborough. The Mela once again brought together people of all ages, backgrounds and cultures in a joyful celebration of diversity.

This much-loved annual event continues to thrive thanks to the incredible support of countless individuals and groups. While the list of contributors is too long to name individually, we are deeply grateful to everyone who played a part in making this year's Mela such a success. A special thanks to Fearon Hall for hosting a Mela fundraiser meal and to the Anand Mangal Group who provided an event raising nearly £450.

The day was packed with colour, culture and creativity, a true showcase of the rich cultural tapestry that makes our community so special.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who supported the event and to the fantastic crowds who joined us. Your energy and enthusiasm are what make the Loughborough Mela a highlight of the year.



Our Staff & Trustees

It's the people behind Equality Action who make the work possible. Many of our staff are part of the communities we support, so they understand first-hand the challenges people face and provide services with care, insight and commitment.

Our trustees also play a vital role in ensuring good governance and keeping us aligned with our mission. Their ongoing support helps safeguard the wellbeing of our staff and the people we work with.

A heartfelt thank you to our incredible team:

- Varsha, Chief Executive
- Mina, Administrator
- Minara, Zee, Mehraj, Chayara, Project Officers
- Chayara, Amina, Kazi, Caseworkers
- Mazim, Casework Support
- Matthew, Finance Officer
- Antoaneta, Marketing & Communications

And to our dedicated Board of Trustees:

- Geetha Bala (Chair)
- Dilshad Choudhury (Vice-Chair)
- Rachel Thorpe (Treasurer)
- Jill Vincent
- Ben Smith
- Charles Dobbin
- Yasmin Ali
- Abida Akram



Our Members

Hon. President - The Mayor of Charnwood

Hon. Solicitor - Mr D Pagett-Wright (Moss Solicitors)

Individuals

- Osas Adetutu
- Abida Akram
- Yasmin Ali
- Geetha Bala
- Amrat Bava
- John Catt
- Dilshad Chowdhury
- Angela Clark
- Victoria Clark
- Stanley Cramer
- Charles Dobbin
- Anthony Gimpel
- Ann Gimpel
- Debbie Green
- Alea Hanif
- Mike Jones
- Emily Keightley
- David Lewis
- Peter Lewis
- Sue Velado
- Nicky Morgan
- Betty Newton
- Trevor Shaw
- Ines V Silva
- Ben Smith
- Rachel Thorpe
- Jill Vincent
- Zamzam Yusuf

Organisations

- Brahma Kumaris
- The Bridge East Midlands
- Charnwood Arts
- Falcon Centre
- Geeta Bhawan
- John Storer Charnwood
- Loughborough Council of Faiths
- Loughborough United Reformed Church
- South Asian Health Action
- Loughborough Well Being Centre



Thank You

To our funders, members, partners, and supporters, thank you for standing with us.

We're incredibly grateful to everyone who has contributed their time, funding, technology or resources to help us do what we do. Whether you've supported a project, attended an event, shared your skills or simply believed in our mission, you have made a difference.

Our Funders

A sincere thank you to each of our funders for enabling us to continue our work in the community. Your support helps us reach those who need it most, and we couldn't do it without you.

- [Charnwood Borough Council](#)
- [The National Lottery Community Fund](#)
- [Vita Health Group](#)
- Awards for All
- [Lloyds Bank Foundation](#)
- [NHS Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Integrated Care Board](#)

Contact Us

If you'd like to support our work, collaborate on a project or find out more, we'd love to hear from you.

**Find us:**

66 Nottingham Road, Loughborough LE11 1EU

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[Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [LinkedIn](#)

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