

2025/26

ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT



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Table of Contents

03 - 04

Chair's Report

04

Treasurer's Report

05

CEO's Report

06

Mission, Values & Aims

07

Partnerships & Collaborations

08 - 10

Casework

11 - 14

EmpowHer

15-18

NHS Talking Therapies

19

Communications & Marketing Report

20

Annual Public Lecture

21

Loughborough Mela

22

Our Staff & Trustees

23

Our Members

24

Thank You

03

Chair's Report

CHAIR

Yasmin Ali-Hind

As I reflect on my first year as Chair of Equality Action, I feel both honoured and inspired by the dedication, compassion and resilience shown by everyone involved in the organisation.



This year has been one of growth and achievement. Our EmpowHer programme has successfully completed its second year, continuing to support and empower young women while building strong foundations for the future. We are also delighted to welcome Madina Ibrahim as our new Time to Shine Leader, funded by the Rank Foundation and she will help us further expand our work with young people.

Another significant milestone has been the continued success of our NHS Talking Therapies project. Having now completed five years, the programme has been extended for a further two years. A testament to the impact it continues to have on the mental health and wellbeing of local communities.

We have also launched a newly redesigned website, strengthened our partnership work through events such as the Loughborough Mela and continued our valued collaboration with Loughborough University through our annual Public Lecture.

This year we welcomed new Trustees, while thanking those who have moved on for their valued service and contribution. On behalf of the Board, I would also like to express my sincere thanks to our CEO Varsha Parmar, our staff, volunteers, funders and partners. Their continued commitment and support enable Equality Action to make a meaningful and lasting difference across our communities.

Thank you for continuing to support Equality Action.

Treasurer's Report

Equality Action remains in a sound financial position with healthy reserves. However, a deficit in unrestricted funds highlights the need for more general funding to cover essential running costs such as insurance, heating, telephone and office expenses.

These costs are vital to delivering our services but can be difficult to fund. Our telephone costs alone exceed £800 per quarter, reflecting the time our caseworkers spend contacting agencies on behalf of clients. Without funding for these core costs, delivering our frontline work becomes increasingly challenging. Securing sustainable unrestricted income will therefore remain a key priority.

- **Rachel Thorpe**, Treasurer

05

CEO's Report

CEO

Varsha Parmar

It has been another busy and impactful year for Equality Action, and I am proud of the support we have continued to provide to individuals, families and communities across Charnwood.



With rising living costs, housing and immigration concerns, digital exclusion and poor mental health affecting many people, our staff and volunteers have continued to provide trusted advice, community activities and wellbeing support.

There has also been much to celebrate. EmpowHer has continued to grow, our NHS Talking Therapies partnership has helped more people access mental health support, around 80 people joined our Annual Public Lecture, and the Loughborough Mela once again brought our community together.

Alongside delivering our services, we have continued to strengthen Equality Action and build new relationships and partnerships for the future. I am proud of how our small team continues to adapt, respond and find ways to make a difference wherever we can.

My sincere thanks go to our staff, trustees, volunteers, members, funders, partners and community.

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 aims:

1. Support people from disadvantaged backgrounds
2. Tackle discrimination and challenge unfair systems
3. Improve access to health, education and basic services
4. Build stronger links across communities
5. Make sure people feel safe, supported and empowered

Respect

We create safe, welcoming spaces.

Teamwork

We work with staff, trustees and our community.

Dedication

We are driven by a desire to challenge inequality.

Inclusion

We ensure our services are accessible to everyone.

Partnerships & Collaborations

Strengthening Our Impact

Partnership working is central to how Equality Action supports our communities. By working with local organisations, community groups, funders and statutory services, we strengthen referrals, respond to emerging needs and help ensure underserved communities have a voice. As a strategic partner of Charnwood Borough Council, we maintain strong relationships with stakeholders across the borough.



Corporate Partnerships

This year, we have taken a more proactive approach to local business partnerships, creating opportunities to support our work.

This has included exploring an ongoing partnership with The Fire Station Rothley and developing our relationship with Chesterton House, following their generous grant towards our work.

We hope to build on these relationships and encourage more local businesses to get involved.



08

Casework

Over the past year, Equality Action provided around 1,300 casework appointments to approximately 450 clients, reflecting the continued demand for trusted, accessible support in our community.

People come to us with issues such as immigration, benefits, debt, housing and the cost of living, often facing several challenges at once. Our Caseworkers provide practical and culturally sensitive support, helping people understand their rights, explore their options and access specialist services where needed.

Immigration

We support people with applications, extensions, settlement, citizenship and changing immigration requirements. This year, we became a fee-charging service under the Immigration Advice Authority (IAA), helping us sustain this specialist service while remaining mindful of affordability.



Debt & Cost of Living

Rising household costs continue to put pressure on local families. We support people with debt, benefits and financial difficulties, helping them understand their options and access appropriate support.

Benefits & Welfare

We help people understand their entitlements, complete forms, challenge decisions and navigate online systems, particularly where language or digital skills create additional barriers.

Housing

We support people facing high rents, arrears, poor housing, overcrowding or homelessness, helping them understand their rights and available options.

Building Confidence & Independence

Our support goes beyond immediate problems, helping people build the confidence to manage things independently – from finding cheaper utilities and insurance to using comparison sites and navigating services themselves.

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

10

Casework

Case Study

This case shows the value of long-term, person-centred support, particularly when someone's needs and situation change over time.

We helped T access Adult Social Care and funding for essential home adaptations, enabling her husband to remain safely at home for a longer period. We also reviewed the household's finances and helped them access available support.

Following her husband's death, our support continued with funeral arrangements and costs, closing accounts and transferring the property into her name, helping her manage these practical responsibilities while grieving.

With a limited support network in the UK, we connected her with befrienders from her own community who spoke her language. She also joined EmpowHer activities, helping her rebuild confidence and social connections.

When she decided to return to India to be closer to her wider family, we supported the practical arrangements for resettlement.

Our support included: Adult Social Care • Home adaptations • Income maximisation • Bereavement support • Funeral costs • Property administration • Befriending • EmpowHER • Resettlement

As her circumstances changed, our support changed with them, ensuring she had the right support when she needed it.

11

EmpowHer

Now in its second year, our five-year EmpowHER Project supports women and young people to build confidence, skills and connections. **Around 300 women and young people are engaged each month**, with our work focusing on four key areas:

Women's Economic Empowerment

Helping with CVs, job applications and mock interviews to build skills and confidence.

Community Connectors & Befrienders

Sewing, walking and group activities that build friendships and reduce isolation.

Youth Empowerment

Organising sports and creative activities that bring young people together to discuss the challenges they face.

Influencing Local Services

Helping clients and beneficiaries have their say in consultations that shape local services.



Supporting Women into Employment

EmpowHER provides one-to-one support with CVs, job applications, interview preparation and digital skills, helping women overcome barriers and navigate recruitment confidently.

Year 2 Impact

50 women received one-to-one support with CVs and job applications during Year 2.

- 68% reported increased confidence applying for jobs
- 40% independently submitted a job application
- 12 women moved into paid employment
- 8 women progressed into volunteering
- 2 women began developing business ideas

“I had been struggling to get a job for six years and, in the space of two weeks, secured two part-time cleaning jobs at a school. The support from EmpowHER has been life-changing.”

Wellbeing & Community

EmpowHer goes beyond employment, with our walking and sewing groups, health fairs, Women’s Day celebrations and annual day trip helping women build skills, stay active, make friends and reduce isolation, while providing opportunities to take a greater role in planning activities and developing leadership skills.

Thank you to our Project Officers, Minara and Madina, for creating spaces where women feel supported.

Mrs A joined EmpowHer in early 2024 after spending several years out of employment while raising her two children. Initially, she lacked confidence, had limited digital skills and felt anxious about applying for jobs.

Her first step was joining the Walking Group, where she was able to improve her wellbeing and build connections with other women. Over time, she developed a trusting relationship with the project officer, who provided one-to-one support to help her move towards employment.

Mrs A created her first professional CV, learned how to complete online job applications and prepared for interviews. She also joined the sewing group, which helped strengthen her communication skills and social confidence.

In six months:

5 applications • 3 interviews • 1 job secured

Her journey did not stop there. Having grown in confidence, Mrs A has since begun volunteering to support new members of the walking group and has expressed an interest in becoming a befriender.

Mrs A's story demonstrates the wider impact of EmpowHer. What began with a walking group became a journey towards employment, volunteering, leadership and greater community participation.

InspireHer

The Next Chapter

In April 2026, Madina joined Equality Action as our Young Women's Development Officer, funded through The Rank Foundation's Time to Shine Leadership Programme.

Time to Shine is a 12-month programme that gives Madina the opportunity to lead a project while developing her own skills, confidence and leadership.



As part of EmpowHer, Madina is developing InspireHer, creating opportunities for young women to explore their interests and aspirations, develop confidence, try new things and have a greater voice in shaping activities.

"A key part of InspireHer is listening to young women and allowing their experiences and ideas to influence what we develop." - Madina, Young Women's Development Officer

Our first InspireHer event, Sip & Sketch, takes place in September 2026. Facilitated by Pencil Club, the session will welcome young women aged 16–25 for a relaxed creative activity while giving us an opportunity to hear what they want from InspireHer.

Over the coming year, Madina will focus on building relationships with young women, developing local partnerships and creating strong foundations for InspireHer's future.

NHS Talking Therapies

Five Years of Community Impact

Funded by Vita Health Group, our five-year NHS Talking Therapies project began in 2021, improving awareness of and access to mental health support across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR), particularly within communities under-represented in these services. Following the programme's completion, our work has been extended for a further two years.

Our Five-Year Impact

- 385 individuals referred to NHS Talking Therapies
- 1,345 people engaged in wellbeing activities, including arts and crafts and rock painting
- 958 people took part in physical activities, including walks, swimming and seated exercise
- 138 events and sessions organised and attended, including health events, wellbeing sessions and coffee mornings
- 28 case studies developed to capture individual experiences and outcomes



NHS Talking Therapies

Community Outreach

Over the five years, our Project Officers worked across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to raise awareness of NHS Talking Therapies, provide information and signposting, and support people with referrals.

Our outreach covered areas including Loughborough, Belgrave, Highfields, Hamilton, Braunstone, Spinney Hill, Evington, Oadby, Wigston, Aylestone, Blaby, Birstall, Thurmaston, St Matthew's, Narborough Road and Leicester City Centre.

Main areas of work:

- Community outreach and awareness
- Referrals and signposting
- Creative wellbeing activities
- One-to-one wellbeing coaching
- Partnership working
- Multilingual and culturally sensitive support

Thank you to our Project Officers, Zee, Mehraj and Chayara, for offering a lifeline to so many.



NHS Talking Therapies

Case Study

M attended our community art workshops, delivered across Leicester City in partnership with local organisations. During one of the workshops, M shared some of the challenges she was experiencing and was signposted to NHS Talking Therapies. She also chose to take part in one-to-one wellbeing coaching.

At the start of coaching, M described feeling overwhelmed by conflict and lacking confidence in expressing her own needs. She also wanted to become a stronger role model for her children. While accessing NHS Talking Therapies for underlying trauma, her coaching focused on ways to improve her emotional wellbeing.

Across six sessions, M learned techniques to regulate her nervous system, set healthy emotional boundaries and recognise her own needs. She also used practical tools such as time-blocking to make more space for activities that supported her wellbeing.

As the sessions progressed, M reported feeling calmer, more confident and less affected by confrontation. She also completed an independent activity outside her comfort zone, which she described as a significant personal achievement.

By the end of the coaching, she had ongoing support in place through NHS Talking Therapies and practical tools to continue supporting her wellbeing and confidence.

NHS Talking Therapies

Positive Feedback

From Our Partners

"For some, it was their first time painting and meeting other women in this type of setting. They felt safe and comfortable."

- Panahghar

"The activities kept members engaged and made them feel cheerful. We would welcome more sessions from Equality Action."

- Diabetes Self-Help Support Group

From Our Participants

"A very original experience that opened up conversations about giving and sharing."

"Powerful and insightful."

"Great session! Lots to take away about connection. It's okay to let go."



1-2-1 Coaching

"The sessions were very helpful and practical. I found some of the advice life changing."



Communications & Marketing Report

Marketing & Communications Officer **Antoaneta Blagoeva**

Over the past 12 months, I have continued to strengthen Equality Action's visibility, engagement and consistency across our communications.



Facebook remains our strongest platform for community engagement, while Instagram and LinkedIn continue to develop. Collaborative, staff and partnership content has performed particularly well, alongside an increased focus on video.

I have continued to manage our social media, website, quarterly newsletters, blogs and key campaigns, including the Annual Public Lecture and Loughborough Mela. I have also worked to improve our website visibility and ensure our communications reflect the breadth of work happening across Equality Action.

Alongside my core marketing activity, I have focused on developing additional skills that can contribute to both my own professional development and the wider organisation. This has included regular fundraising training, contributing to our new 12-month fundraising strategy and developing my knowledge of bid writing and corporate partnerships.

Over the next year, I will continue focusing on audience growth, video and recurring content, stronger community engagement and further developing my fundraising and bid-writing skills.

20

Annual Public Lecture

Keeping Our Children and Young People Safe Online

Equality Action's Annual Public Lecture brought together voices from policing, education, health and the voluntary sector to have an open dialogue focused on keeping children and young people safe online. We explored both the opportunities of digital spaces and risks including exploitation, harmful content, misinformation, cyberbullying and social pressures.

Keynote speakers Grace Strong, Director of Prevention with Leicestershire Police, and Lisa Wilkinson, Community & Young People Involvement Manager, shared their insights, followed by a panel featuring Dr Nisha Karia, Sarah Sadler, Hema Badger-Mistry and youth representative Ismail Sarwar.

The event reinforced an important message: keeping children and young people safe online is a shared responsibility.



21

Loughborough Mela 2026

Loughborough Mela returned in August, bringing Loughborough Town Centre together for a vibrant celebration of culture, diversity and community. Throughout the day, dancers, musicians and artists took to the stage, alongside a wide range of stalls.

The Mela is a great example of what can be achieved through local collaboration, bringing organisations, community groups, volunteers, performers, businesses and residents together.

A special thank you to Mela Coordinator Mehraj Alamgir, our partners Charnwood Borough Council, John Storer Charnwood, Charnwood Arts, Brahma Kumaris and Fearon Hall, and everyone who helped make the day possible.

Most importantly, thank you to everyone who joined us and once again made the Mela a much-loved celebration.



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 ensure good governance, uphold our mission and safeguard staff and communities.

A heartfelt thank you to our team:

- Varsha, Chief Executive
- Mina, Administrator
- Minara, Zee, Mehraj, Chayara, Project Officers
- Chayara, Amina, Kazi, Caseworkers
- Matthew, Finance Officer
- Antoaneta, Marketing & Communications
- Madina, Young Women's Development Officer

And to our Board of Trustees:

- Yasmin Ali-Hind (Chair)
- Geetha Bala (Vice-Chair)
- Rachel Thorpe (Treasurer)
- Joanne Gunn-Allen
- Emily Keightley
- Veronica Moore
- Nurain Nur
- Salma Salik
- Abida Akram
- Ben Smith
- Osas Adetutu
- Dilshad Chowdhury



Hon. President - The Mayor of Charnwood

Individuals

- Osas Adetutu
- Abida Akram
- Yasmin Ali
- Geetha Bala
- John Catt
- Dilshad Chowdhury
- Angela Clark
- Victoria Clark
- Charles Dobbin
- Anthony Gimpel
- Ann Gimpel
- Debbie Green
- Mike Jones
- Emily Keightley
- David Lewis
- Peter Lewis
- Sue Meredith Velado
- Nicky Morgan
- Betty Newton
- Trevor Shaw
- Ines V Silva
- Rachel Thorpe
- Jill Vincent
- Daphne Beale

Organisations

- Brahma Kumaris
- The Bridge EA
- Charnwood Arts
- Falcon Centre
- Geeta Bhawan
- John Storer Charnwood
- Sikh Temple (Gurudwara)
- Fearon Hall
- Loughborough University
- Loughborough Council of Faiths
- Loughborough United Reformed Church
- South Asian Health Action
- Loughborough Wellbeing Centre
- Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPs)

Thank You

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

- Charnwood Borough Council
- The National Lottery Community Fund
- Vita Health Group
- Awards for All
- The Rank Foundation

Get Involved

Support Equality Action by becoming a member, volunteering, fundraising, donating or partnering with us.

However you get involved, you'll be helping us continue our work within the local community.

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

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.

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