

equality
action

ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

2023/24

Registered Charity Number: 1088411
Companies House Number: 4198889

**UNIQUELY
DIFFERENT,
EQUALLY
VALUED**

FOSTERING
EQUITY AND
INCLUSION,
HONOURING
DIGNITY AND
RESPECT FOR
ALL.

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Chair's Report



“NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF THOUGHTFUL, COMMITTED, CITIZENS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD. INDEED, IT IS THE ONLY THING THAT EVER HAS.”

SO SAYS MARGARET MEAD, WELL KNOWN 20TH CENTURY ANTHROPOLOGIST.

This is not far from the truth when reflecting on the work of Equality Action which has existed for 55 years and still going strong. In the past year, the organisation has had a huge impact, through various projects, on the communities it has worked with. There are more details in this report.

Our ability to bring about the much needed change will not be possible without the vision, trust and generosity of our funders: The National Lottery Community Fund, Charnwood Borough Council, Vita Health Group, Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated Care Board, Lloyds Bank Foundation, Awards for All and National Grid.

Having successfully delivered our Positive Minds Project, we have been rewarded by the National Lottery Community Fund with funding for a further five-year project titled EmpowHER. Details of this exciting project are provided in this report by Minara, the project lead.

Behind every successful project, is a team of thoughtful, committed and dedicated members of staff who deliver over and above what is asked of them. Success of these projects is dependent on strong administrative support and wide exposure on various social media platforms. A big thank you to each and everyone of them. Credit must also go to our Chief Executive, Varsha Parmar who has contributed much to the growth and success of Equality Action, not only in the past year but over many years.

I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues on the Board for their support, hard work and dedication. Their contributions as members of the various sub-committees should not be underestimated.

As we celebrate the successes of the past year, we look forward to meeting the challenges ahead with positivity and confidence.

Geetha Bala
Chair

Treasurer's Report



During the year, we have been improving our accounting reporting to the Trustees and how we monitor the grants held. This means it is clearer as to what funding is being spent directly on the project and how much is going to office costs and management.

We have set up a new business savings account with the Loughborough Building Society to diversify where we hold our reserves and to get a better interest rate.

I have been working with Varsha to ensure grant proposals are sensible financially, covering the direct project cost and contributing to overheads.

Financially, we were able to cover our office and management costs from projects plus direct income. This included membership fees, donations and gift aid. The remaining costs were covered by reserves.

We also raised £1183 from the sponsored Santa Fun Run. We will be looking at other fund-raising opportunities going forward.

Matthew has been keeping a close eye on utility and phone bills, making sure Equality Action is always getting the best deals.

I look forward to the coming year and continuing to work closely with the Equality Action staff.

Rachel Thorpe
Treasurer

Chief Executive Officer's Report



It has been an exciting, yet challenging, year with Equality Action going through many changes.

Thanks to the generous 2 year grant from Lloyds Bank Foundation (2022-2024), we were able to employ an Operations Officer who took on a lot of my tasks, allowing me to focus on the strategic work.

With consultancy support also paid for by Lloyds Bank Foundation, we were able to work with external consultants to review our strategic goals. This included strategic reviews of:

- Our aims and direction over the coming 3 years.
- Our communications and marketing
- Our funding and income diversification

We are delighted to have made good progress on all three reviews and have grown as an organisation to better meet the needs of our beneficiaries. Our 3 year business plan reflects this.

I would like to thank all our funders, partners, members, trustees, staff, not forgetting those working behind the scenes (Matthew, Mazim, Geetika, Mina and Keya) and volunteers without whose support this would not have been possible. We look forward to continuing supporting our beneficiaries to the best of our ability.

Varsha Parmar
CEO

OUR MISSION

- A diverse and inclusive environment where every individual is respected.
 - Accountability to our beneficiaries and stakeholders, ensuring transparency and integrity in all our actions,
 - We work with passion and commitment in meeting the needs of the community.
 - Achieving more together through teamwork and maintaining honesty and respect in all interactions.
- Promote equality and diversity, dignity, and respect through inclusion.
 - Be accountable while fostering good relationships among stakeholders.
 - Create a safe, trustworthy environment for our beneficiaries.

WE VALUE

OUR AIMS

- To promote good relations, eliminate discrimination, and campaign for equality.
- To improve community cohesion, better educational results, and health for families, and overall, empowering people that are of disadvantaged backgrounds.

OUR VALUES



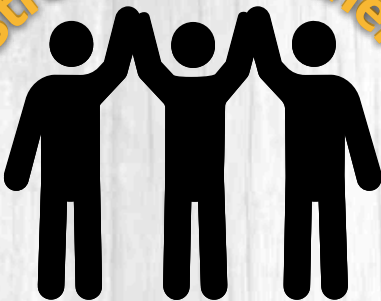
Honest Work



Integrity



Stronger together



Teamwork



Casework

Universal Credit

By the end of 2024, Tax Credit (TC) will be phased out, and everyone on TC will need to switch to Universal Credit (UC) when notified. Those migrating from TC to UC will keep their current benefits, such as money for all their children, while new UC claims only cover a maximum of two children. The migration process is staggered, so not everyone will need to switch at the same time. To assist our service users with language barriers and computer skills, we set up UC workshops to help them and their families with the transition until they felt confident managing it on their own.

Household Support Grant.

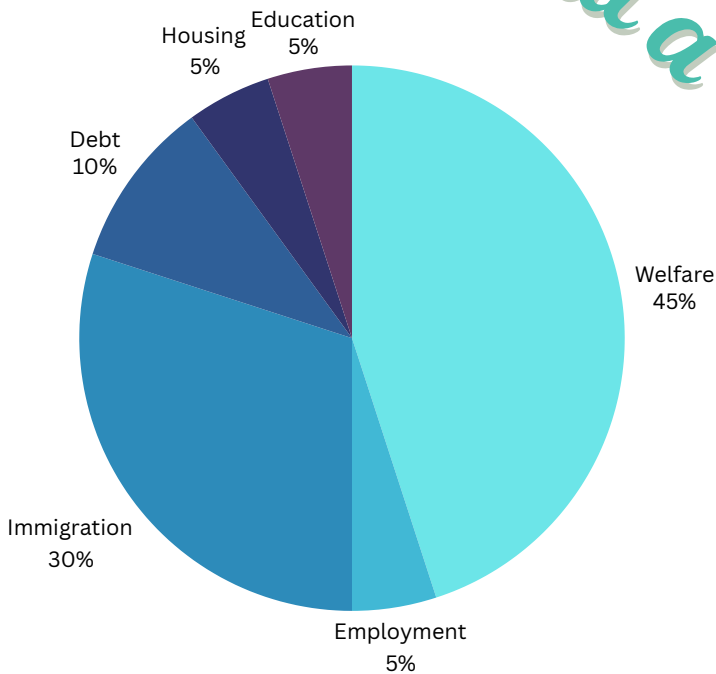
Vulnerable families with debt can apply for a grant from Leicestershire County Council. We registered as an agent for this scheme, allowing us to submit applications on behalf of our service users. Throughout the year, we assisted them in applying during several rounds, helping families secure food and fuel vouchers.

While our caseworkers address immediate issues, these challenges significantly impact our clients' well-being and mental health. To provide holistic support, our Positive Minds, EmpowHer and Vita Minds project officers collaborate closely with caseworkers to make referrals for talking therapy and assist clients in exploring ways to increase household income through upskilling and improving employability.

All praise goes to our caseworkers:

Chayara Chowdhury, Amina Wadud and Kazi Mashud
for supporting our clients through these difficult times.

Casework at a Glance



Mrs C's story

Mrs. C and her family were in receipt of tax credits. Mrs. C's husband works, and she was not able to return to work due to caring for her elderly father-in-law. When they were looking to migrate from tax Credits to Universal Credit, we used the Turn2Us benefit calculator and identified that Mrs. C was eligible to apply for Carers Allowance. We successfully helped Mrs. C apply for Carers Allowance. The family have switched to Universal Credit and Mrs. C is in receipt of Carers Allowance. As a result of our support they are financially better off.

Mr A's story

Mr. A. a Polish national, has been in the UK since 2006, but his immigration documents were not up to date so he couldn't claim any benefits. Mr. A was admitted to hospital with chest pains, he needed to have stents put in to clear the blockages in his heart. While getting checked in hospital, Mr. A was unexpectedly diagnosed with bladder cancer.

Due to his ill health, Mr. A is not able to work and has no money as a result. Mr. A is facing eviction from his privately rented house due to being in arrears with his rent for over a year. Our caseworker Amina has helped Mr. A apply for his Immigration status under the European Rules. Amina was able to secure his immigration status, Mr. A has been given Indefinite leave to remain status. Mr. A has claimed Universal Credit, and it will help cover his living expenses and accommodation costs. Mr. A had since been able to secure accommodation through the council's homelessness support system as he was living in private rental property.

Mr. A is also a connector for the Core 20plus Project, where he can share his lived experiences with others, so they are better informed about making the right health choices.

Amina Wadud
Chayara Chowdhury
Kazi Mashud
- Caseworkers

IMPACT OF OUR WORK THIS PAST YEAR



Different cases dealt with, including Immigration, Debt, Benefits etc.



participants across all projects, such as health fairs and workshops



workshops on health topics facilitated by the NHS and Universities with our support to reach the target audience



Cook, Meet and Eat sessions on learning numeracy and budgeting through cooking



Referrals to NHS Talking Therapies

OUR PROJECTS

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Positive Minds

After 5 years of the Positive Minds project which ended in December 2023, we can now look back and truly see the significant impact this has had on women from Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. Over the course of the project, we have successfully delivered the following key objectives:

- **Increased** awareness of mental health issues within the community, empowering women to recognise symptoms and seek appropriate support.
- **Enhanced** overall health and wellbeing of our beneficiaries through targeted interventions and support services.
- **Boosted** confidence among women, particularly those aged 50 and above, in leading and managing health related activities.
- **Expanded** opportunities for employment, volunteering, and further education, providing pathways to personal and professional growth.

This project has made a lasting impact, fostering resilience and empowerment within the BAME community.



We thank Minara and Yesmin, our dedicated project staff, who have worked tirelessly alongside the women to help them achieve their goals.

Impact at a Glance



150
Women attending weekly support groups



100%
Participants felt confident helping another with their mental health



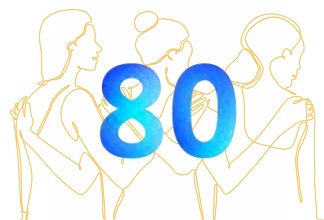
200
Over 200 women participating in physical activities weekly



£2000
Raised for charity by Youths in the 'Apprentice' project



x3
More participation in the Fitness Scheme had tripled over the projects duration



80
Women supported with employment and mentorship



5
Befrienders supporting elderly and vulnerable women



42/60
70% of the referees found the NHS Talking Therapies helpful



20
Project beneficiaries trained as mental health first aiders

Impact in Detail

The Positive Minds Project made a profound impact on the BAME community across the borough of Charnwood by reducing the mental health stigma, increasing access to support service, and encouraging physical activity. The project also enhanced employability and volunteer opportunities, fostering a supportive and resilient community. Through various initiatives, the project improved individual lives and contributed to the broader goal of creating an inclusive and empathetic community.

As a reflection on the accomplishments of the past five years, it is evident that these initiatives have not only positively impacted individuals but have also contributed to the broader goal of creating a more inclusive and resilient community. The ongoing commitment to mental health awareness and support remains crucial for creating lasting positive change.

Feedback from people we have supported:

"The sense of community and belonging I feel here is incredible. It's a safe haven where I can share my thoughts and feelings without fear of judgement."

"I have learnt so much by attending these groups! Thank you for all the support, I don't have enough words to say about the difference it has made to my life."

"This is my safe place to talk about my feelings, I feel so much better after attending!"





THE SUCCESSOR OF POSITIVE MINDS

Following the conclusion of the Positive Minds Project in December 2023, we launched the EmpowHer Project in January 2024. Building on the foundation of our previous efforts, EmpowHer is designed to continue empowering women from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, helping them reach their full potential.

Key aims:

- **Women's Economic Empowerment:** Equip women with skills and resources for financial independence through tailored programmes and workshops.
- **Community Leadership:** Empower women as leaders and advocates to address local issues and foster collaboration.
- **Youth Engagement:** Provide young people with skills and experiences to actively shape their communities.
- **Service Influence:** Enable beneficiaries to lead and influence local services, particularly in healthcare and education.
- **Mental Health Support:** Continue promoting positive mental health through community-led activities and open dialogue.

Future Impact:

- **Economic Empowerment:** Participants gain essential skills and resources to pursue financial independence.
- **Community Leadership:** Women trained as leaders to address local issues and promote community collaboration.
- **Youth Engagement:** Young people equipped with skills to actively contribute to their communities.
- **Service Influence:** Beneficiaries empowered to shape local services, ensuring they better meet community needs.
- **Mental Health Support:** Continued focus on mental well-being encouraging open conversations and community-led activities.

Work with Young People

Building on the successes of our Youth Apprentice Programme in 2022 and the Young Women's Project in 2023 we have continued to build on our work with young people.

Through the EmpowHer Project we facilitated three workshops on effective communication and interview techniques from 28th January to 11th February 2024. These were designed and delivered by a local person Toneya Sarwar.

The objective of the workshops was to improve communication for young people aged between 17-20 years old. We are in an age where the youth spend disproportionately more time on screens and have become accustomed to communicating via text message and social media applications.

Once they leave the safe and comfortable confines of the school system they can find university and employment difficult to adapt to. As apprenticeships become increasingly popular some of them have to start interviewing for places while they are still at school.



Feedback received

Below are excerpts from feedback sent by the participants, they ALL said they would recommend the workshop to friends and family members. They would all be willing to pay for future courses/workshops, they all found the workshop, enlightening, informative and surprisingly enjoyable. There was full participation over the 3 weeks except for a couple who were absent due to illness.

“Having the workshop in person made it real, we had to work with strangers and learn quickly, the only thing I would improve is to have more sessions so we could practice more”

Farah A-Level student.

“The workshop really helped my overall confidence.”

Yusra A-Level student.

“You created a calm, safe atmosphere which allowed some of the more shy people to come out of their shell”

Zaynab, 20yrs

“I really liked how you shared your own personal stories to show us the importance of story telling, I am not comfortable talking about myself so I know I need to work on this.”

Safiyah BTEC student.

“One thing that stood out for me was the focus on body language, it really made me aware of how my gestures and expressions can impact my communication.”

Zahra A-Level student.

“Getting feedback from the group was eye-opening, some things I was pleasantly surprised with others I need to work on!”

Zaid A-level student.





This was followed by a 'Youth Empowerment' event on 30th June at Fearon Hall designed to help equip young people with the suitable knowledge, skills and experience to thrive in their personal and professional lives.

This was planned and executed by a young member of the community, Ismail Sarwar with support from our project officer.

Objectives

- To organise, market and deliver a 'Careers Day' event to launch the 'Youth Empowerment' project amongst youngsters in the local community.
- To create a mentorship program which matches youngsters to suitable mentors to help them with their academic, professional and personal journeys.

Over 40 young people and some parents attended the session held between 2 and 5pm. We had a diverse panel of 6 local people who talked about their careers, the obstacles they face, the difficult decisions they had to make as they progressed through their chosen career paths.



There was a chance to ask questions and the audience had the opportunity to talk to the panel on a 1-2-1 basis. Several key people in the community were identified as role models, mentors to support the youngsters and we are hoping to take this forward in the coming years.

Core20 Plus Connectors



Core20 Plus was a short project funded by the NHS. The aim of the project was to recruit connectors from the community, who have experience of the following health conditions:

- Respiratory
- Hypertension
- Cancer
- Long Covid



We recruited 12 connectors between the ages of 18 to 70, from diverse backgrounds, Bangladeshi, Gujarati, Punjabi and Polish.

The connectors shared their lived experiences at events and workshops with others, sharing their life experiences, barriers they faced and how they addressed them. They talked about the importance of seeking help and early interventions, not to ignore any symptoms.

We collaborated with health professionals and Cancer Research to raise awareness and deliver sessions on the focus areas. We facilitated workshops on how to use some of the screening kits such as bowel cancer, kidney, eye screening and the importance of attending smear tests and breast screening when invited by the GP surgery. People learnt how to manage and monitor blood pressure at home.

NHS Talking Therapies

We are proud to be a community partner with Vita Health Group in a five-year project aimed at improving access to NHS Talking Therapies services across Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland (LLR), with a special focus on individuals from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.

Our project staff lead well-being and creative activities in areas with high BAME populations, using arts, crafts, music, and other creative methods to engage with individuals and groups. These activities have a lasting impact, helping to reduce social isolation and raising awareness of available resources to support mental and physical health issues.

Through the engagement, they promote the service and help with referrals to free NHS Talking Therapies services provided by Vita Health Group. These services are tailored to address lower-level mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, depression, phobias, panic attacks, and more.



NHS Talking Therapies

This year, our NHS Talking Therapies project actively engaged with diverse communities across Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland through a variety of events and activities. We organised a Family Wellbeing Asian Arts session at Westcotes Library, where participants from diverse backgrounds learned about NHS Talking Therapies and received referral support. At the Community and Volunteering Showcase in South Wigston, we connected with over 60 attendees, promoting the service and engaging with local organisations.

Our "Time to Talk Chai and Chat" event at Loughborough Wellbeing Centre brought together 25 individuals, fostering discussions on mental health and encouraging access to therapy services. We also regularly attended Zinithya Trust's monthly coffee mornings, reaching out to South Asian communities and sharing vital information on accessing mental health support. Additionally, at a New Year Health and Wellbeing event at Aylestone Leisure Centre, we connected with over 80 attendees, raising awareness and making a direct referral to NHS Talking Therapies.

Through these efforts, we have successfully promoted NHS Talking Therapies services, reduced stigma, and made the service more accessible to diverse communities.



NHS Talking Therapies PICTURED



COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEERING
SHOWCASE EVENT IN
SOUTH WIGSTON



New Year Health Event



'Time to talk' 'Chai and Chat

Monthly coffee sessions



with Zinhiya

Trust



FAMILY WELLBEING ART SESSION
AT WESTCOTES LIBRARY

PRESENTATION AT JUNPER
TRAINING CENTRE



HEALTH AND WELLBEING
EVENT



Ms BB's story

Ms. BB, an 18-year-old, has been living with her grandparents for the past year. She feels more comfortable staying with them rather than with her mother. Although she loves her grandparents and enjoys their company, she recently began experiencing disturbing visions of shadows in her room. These visions have caused her significant fear and anxiety, leading to sleepless nights and irritability during the day. This has not only affected her relationship with her grandparents but has also led to feelings of depression.

Ms. BB realised she needed professional help to manage her anxiety, fear, and depression. She decided to seek support through NHS Talking Therapies. However, she was unsure how to start the process so our staff supported her with the referral process. She expressed her desire to speak with a therapist to help her manage her mental health issues.

The referral process was done efficiently, and Ms. BB was pleased with how swiftly everything moved. On the same day she was referred, she received a call for an initial assessment. This quick response reassured her and gave her hope that she was on the right path to getting the help she needed.

Ms. BB is currently receiving therapy through the NHS Talking Therapies service. She is optimistic that the ongoing sessions will help her address her anxiety, fear, and depression. The prompt support she received has left her feeling grateful and hopeful for the future.

Mehraj

Mrs. C's story

Mrs C was first referred to the NHS Talking Therapies in 2021. At that time, she was feeling extremely stressed and anxious due to dealing with a complex legal case relating to her adult son. He had been violently attacked, suffered severe brain trauma and now requires specialist care.

Mrs C is of African heritage, a single parent with no immediate family support and socially isolated. Following the advice of her Local Area Coordinator, Mrs C contacted the our Project Officer to discuss her support needs. She was referred to the talking therapies service and signposted to other sources of community support including a local Crisis Café and the Carers Centre.

Mrs C received six talking therapies sessions and CBT counselling through the Vita Health group and free legal and welfare rights advice from The Carers Centre. She was also encouraged to attend a coffee morning run by the Zinithya Trust and participated in craft activities led by our Project Officer

By addressing her mental health needs and accepting ongoing support Mrs C was able to make fundamental changes to her situation. This enabled her to make informed decisions, develop her self-confidence and self-determination. Over the last 3 years she remained in contact with the our staff and was encouraged to share her own lived experiences with others.

In June 2024 Mrs C was a keynote speaker at a special 'Living with diabetes' event organised by the local Vita Health team in Leicester to an audience of 40+ people.

We quote her, "Never in a million years did I think I would have made it this far - sharing my journey with a room full of strangers! It's a blessing to know that I can help people. I'm so thankful for support I received it made all the difference. I am no longer anxious, or feel judged, instead I'm hopeful for the future".

Anita

Mr. X's story

Mr X attended the Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre coffee mornings. Since the pandemic, Mr X has been feeling lonely, depressed and is suffering from health related issues. Our project officer, Chayara talked to Mr X about the NHS Talking Therapies service. She stressed how important it is to seek support, particularly from trained professionals.

Mr X took all the information, he had the option of self referring or getting help from Chayara with the referral process. Mr X did get referred with support from Chayara and will be getting help from the service going forward.

Chayara

We extend our gratitude to our three project staff, **Anita, Chayara, and Mehraj**, who work diligently across the city and county, engaging with groups and facilitating referrals to NHS Talking Therapies.

Loughborough MELA



The Loughborough Mela is a celebration of unity, diversity, and inclusivity. It brings together people from different backgrounds, cultures, and walks of life, fostering a sense of togetherness and harmony within our community.

We hosted the Mela on Sunday 25th August in Loughborough Town centre with over 5000 people attending the event. Thanks to all our partners and Charnwood Borough Council for the grant that made this event possible.



It was amazing to meet so many in our community and share stories and more

Wonderful to speak with all the stall holders and some fantastic entertainment.

Thanks to all of you who made this happen today

- Julie Bradshaw MBE



Just come back from the Mela and I must say, what a fantastic afternoon's entertainment.

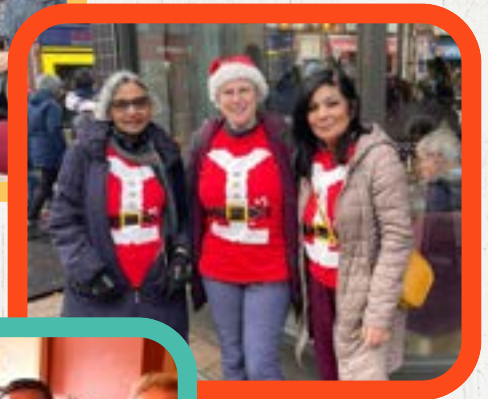
In light of the recent disturbances in the UK, how nice it was to see so many communities coming together in peace and enjoyment.

A very big thank you to all involved in the organisation of the event.

- David Kirkby

OUR STAFF & TRUSTEES

Our staff are pivotal in providing appropriate services for the needs of our clients and beneficiaries. They listen to people at grass root level and are part of the communities we serve, therefore understand first hand the issues that face them.



Our trustees play a vital role to ensure our organisation's governance is in line with the Charity Commission and Companies House rules and we work to our mission, aims and objectives. They have been a great source of support for us throughout the year ensuring the well-being and safety of our staff, volunteers and clients.

Members

Hon. President The Mayor of Charnwood

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

Trustees

G Bala
A Akram
J Vincent
Z Yusuf
K Mistry
E Keightley
C Dobbin
O Adetutu
R Thorpe
B Smith
D Chowdhury
A Hanif

Individuals

A Bava
J Catt
A Clark
V Clark
S Cramer
A & A Gimpel
D Green
M Jones

D Lewis
P Lewis
S Meredith Velado
N Morgan
B Newton
T Shaw
I V Silva

Organisations

Brahma Kumaris
The Bridge East Midlands
Falcon Support Services East Midlands
Loughborough Wellbeing Centre CIO
Fearon Community Association
John Storer Charnwood
Loughborough United Reformed
Church

Loughborough Constituency
Labour Party
Loughborough Baptist Church
Gurdwara Sahib Loughborough
Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPs)
Trinity Methodist Church
Holy Trinity Church
Charnwood Arts
Gorse Covert Community Centre

Thank you!

To our supporters, funders and members for your support throughout the year.

Our funders

CHARNWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL
LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOUNDATION
THE NATIONAL LOTTERY COMMUNITY FUND
THE RANK FOUNDATION
VITA HEALTH GROUP
AWARDS FOR ALL
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND
LLOYDS BANK FOUNDATION
NHS COMMISSIONING SUPPORT UNIT
LEICESTER, LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND INTEGRATED
CARE BOARD

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to each individual who has contributed their time, financial resources, technology, or goods to support our efforts over the past year. Thank you for making a difference.



equality action

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**FOLLOW
US:**



***Thanks to Mazim Rahman, Operations Officer,
for his creative design of this report.***