

Trust Links Annual General Meeting
Held on Wednesday 16th October at 2.30 pm at Trust Links House, Rochford

Attendees

Ron Bates - SEEEOG Ane Bates - SEEEOG, Rachel Heemskerk - DWP, Matt Cubitt – Mid Essex Recovery College, Jamie Walker – SAVS, Laura Carter – MHM SEE Employment Service, Sammy Tyler – MHM SEE Employment Services, Carole and Vic Shorney – SEEEOG Cllr Angelina Marriot – Rochford District Council, Jamie Sawtell – Bar N Bus, Alan Webb – Art Ministry, Tim Watts – Leigh Lions, Leandra Symes – ECC Youth Service, Becs Korniej - ECVYS

Staff

Matt King, Gareth Evans, Lucy Finnie, Maurice Lee, Ana Isidoro, Luke Kemzura

Trustees

Jackie Bliss, Pauline Stratford, Lucy Norman, Paul Bridges

Members

9 members

Apologies

Jill Allen-King MBE, Rhe Bengner, Eileen Peck, Alex Paterson, Michael Anderson Catherine Stephenson, John Walker ,Lloyd Brooks, Rachael Bemrose, Jacqui Stimpson Sarah Worster, Steve Smith, Taz Syed, Victoria Marsouki, Sharon Woodfield Elain Hayter Patrick – Postcode Places Trust, Scott Peters, Anna Ostler, Elizabeth Bonnett Natasha Ralph, Kelly Swain, Emily Bradley on behalf of Garfield Weston, Sonya Dallat Richard Chapman, Heather Martin, Tracey Jones, Felicity Mallam, Lucy Janes Aimee Meredith, Moira Groborz, Paul Hill, Lee Monk, Celia Harris

Welcome, introductions and apologies.

Meeting was declared open at 2.30pm.

Matt King, CEO, welcomed all to the meeting. He informed attendees that paper copies of our AGM documents are available by scanning the QR code to get access to all documents.

Jackie Bliss (JB), Chair of Trustees, welcomed all to the meeting and introduced herself, and then introduced CEO Matt King, and Finance Manager, Maurice Lee. She explained how the AGM was a chance to showcase Trust Links and share the charity's journey over time.

She then opened the floor for people to raise hands to indicate who they were representing – Trust Links staff, volunteers, members, supporters – corporate supporters, and trustees past and present, and partner agencies all raised their hands. She thanked all for coming.

A District councillor also introduced themselves to attendees.

Minutes of AGM held on 11th October 2023

The minutes of the last AGM have been shared via QR code, with a few paper copies being circulated today. JB asked if these minutes were accepted as an accurate recorded. Trustee Pauline Stratford agreed the motion, with trustee Paul Bridges seconding.

Presentation of the Annual Report and Accounts 2023-2024

Matt shared a PowerPoint presentation to showcase the annual report which can be accessed via QR code.

The presentation covered such topics such as the scale of what Trust Links do including statistics of service users and those engaged in the charity's projects, including delivery group numbers and courses delivered. This can be accessed via the QR code.

A brief idea of our scale is that we supported 6465 with 4241 that we actively engaged with projects. We had 3082 delivery groups.

Currently, there are 62 staff, quite a few are part time, with 52.4 full time equivalent, 11 bank staff, and 167 volunteers. Members remain at the core of what we do.

Matt contextualised the history of Trust Links and the increase in need in terms of numbers, although staff numbers have not massively increased.

We have waiting lists for some services, and this is the landscape we are working in at present.

Overview of achievements – Rochford District Council business awards, Green Flag award for 3 of our sites, launch of Basildon site, Canvey site – to be discussed later in the meeting.

Getting the word out – sharing with wider community – through our socials, local press, BBC last year, radio coverage, worked hard to get the name out, it's tricky as a local charity. After 20 years we do have a local name but have to keep going with this.

Events also promote our services, for example Apple Day saw approximately 500 attendees.

Growing Together

524 members attended across the year, with 488 actively engaged over 6 sites across the area. GT covers up to Mid Essex area.

We use the Warwick Scale to measure impact. We look at how people feel before and after engaging our services. Please do look at our outcome measures and impact we are making.

Westcliff

Westcliff is our founding site, founded in 2000. Coming up for 25 years next year.

It has seen the Menterprise scheme for men in woodwork and catering take place. The highlight was the Henry Burgers takeover. Westcliff also had the Jubilee party, and is home to the long covid group, music group, art group, writing etc.

Shoebury

This site is now 12 years old. It's a wonderful site, it was empty and now it's a thriving hub for the community. Services here included 2 days of gardening and the horticulture course. The summer fayre had 600 attendees this year.

Rochford

Growing Together happens at this site on a Friday, Seed Potato Day also happens here, members are a tight knit group here on a Friday.

Cressing

We share the site with ECC and other charities. We use the site every Friday.

Basildon

Launched in May 2023, it's a fantastic community hub now. It has Growing Together days like other sites, plus community events, lunches etc. It has matured horticulturally. University of Essex have undertaken an evaluation with us on the site, which can be seen in the annual report. We are keen to share our learning with other partners.

Let's Grow Together

This course is attended by locals plus people overseas. It involves monthly online learning session, opportunities to have 121s with TL staff, participants receive a manual and can also visit our sites. To date, we've had three cohorts complete the course, creating a network across the world.

St Laurence Orchard

This one-acre community orchard is 100 years old. We hold Apple Day at this site, which involves apple cake using apples from the orchard. We also hold our Wassailing event in the Spring and working parties across the year. It is a haven of biodiversity.

Greening projects

This project brings gardening to communities in Basildon and Southend. We've had engagement from 106 people, and 275 attendances last year. It involves building beds, planting trees and engaging families with gardening.

Trees

We planted 1942 trees at various locations and events across the year, including working in partnership with other groups i.e. Action for Trees. Tree planting provides environmental volunteering opportunities plus physical activity.

Other Activities

We've welcomed corporate as well as schools' groups for volunteering, and we held a successful lights evening at our Basildon site, which helped get us known in the local area.

Eco Days - headed by Fiona, provides simple activities such as jam making, recycling etc. We worked with focal point gallery, as well as Milton community partnership

Green Get Together – held at the Ironworks this year.

Essex Green Weekend held at Bradwell this year; 150-200 attendees, all focused on the environment and community.

REACH

REACH's original target was to engage with 400 people when we got the contract 6 years ago; however last year we had 2023 people engage with REACH.

Teams have worked very hard to engage people to help reduce depression, engage with volunteering progression to education, and reduce the demand on A&E and NHS services etc. We've seen some fantastic achievements.

We do many activities including cycling, cooking, fishing, chatting, lots of activities.

Other projects

We also have Talking Together befriending project, which started during Covid and is still going.

We also offer Mental Health First Aid training and offer this out to other agencies.

We run a Long Covid Group at our Westcliff site.

We undertake lots of work to address diversity – Jassa has led that work engaging with the local Muslim community, refugees and asylum seekers etc. We ran a cooking group which allowed refugee and asylum seekers to come along and use our facilities to cook, and socialise in a safe space.

Children, Youth and Families

This covers everything from early year to teens, with everything in between.

Our Learning Together project is for those struggling to attend school and starts again after half term.

Families Growing Together is for the 0-5 years group

Youth Links is an after-school programme for young people with mental health issues or other issues such as neurodiversity

We've had lots of good outcomes for all these projects.

Our Dad's Group on a Saturday is very successful.

Currently, our youth team are training in Forest School skills

We also partner with Thorpedene school

Summary

Matt acknowledged and thanked our amazing Trust Links team – it's everyone that makes it happen, we have amazing trustees, directors, staff, and huge number of volunteers to support us.

Volunteers support with events, befriending, adding extra value to all our services.

Treasurer Summary

Maurice Lee, Finance Manager, took the floor. He discussed how the charity is growing hugely each year – we've had a 2% increase on income since last year, and we hope to reach the £2 million income level this financial year, which would be another milestone reached.

Our funding is a mix – 60-70% come from funding or grants, with a large part being from NHS contracts.

We're very fortunate with the National Lottery funding – our new Bouldering Together project has been funded by them.

We also work with gifts and donations – and fundraising like this does take him to embed.

We also have some income via personal budgets – this is funding for individuals who choose to spend their personal allocated funds on using our services. We have a number of members who do this.

Maurice provided a snapshot of income and expenditure - this is split over donations, which can be both restricted and unrestricted, and we need more unrestricted income to spend on projects.

There was a £25k surplus during year – £13k came from the sale of our catering van.

Expenditure - 81-82% is spent on salaries, which is our biggest cost.

Our cash situation is quite healthy – we have £700k in the bank, with lots tied up in long term accounts, reserves.

We have several bank accounts, and we opened one this year with Reliance Bank, which is part of the Salvation Army – we choose ethical banks where we can.

We spent £12k on upgrading fencing at Basildon.

Matt then discussed our new developments – we are building the Gunny on Canvey Island, will show Video, we also have a new contract to do the planters in Basildon town centre over next 3 years, then Beechwood village, formally Craylands, we have a commission to undertake work there.

Our Listening Together project is new – short term project which we have a small pot of funds for. Peers will be gathering experiences and stories to present to commissioners and funders – those findings will be shared at our March 2025 Conference, and we will also have solution focussed activities.

REACH – over next few months, the recovery college and wellbeing hubs will continue will work with partners in Mid and South Essex; we are working out how this will look but there are positive relationships to take to next level.

Families Growing Together funding carries on until end of March.

Matt then shared a video about the Gunny project on Canvey – showcased the plans for this new site which will open in 2025. He gave thanks to Bear Estate Agents for making the video.

JB thanked Matt for sharing the above. She shared that The Gunny site is approximately 10 years in the making, and we felt it might not happen, but Matt will not give up, and we are proud that this will now happen, and it will be a real addition to the local community. She extended thanks to Matt, the Senior management team and all Trust Links staff and volunteers.

The accounts were then formally received.

Elections of Trustees

JB then moved onto Trustee matters. Keith Spencer, our long-standing treasurer, is stepping down. JB thanked him for his service. Also retiring from their posts at this AGM are Rhe Benger and Valerie Bloomfield.

Janet Phillips, our longest serving trustee, and Jackie Bliss asked to be re-elected and continue for another three-year term each.

We also welcome four new trustees – Sonya Dallat and Jules Box to be elected for 2 years to 2026 and Alex Paterson and Lucy Norman to be elected for 3 years until 2027. Pauline Stratford seconded this motion.

JB stated that we are now looking for a new treasurer trustee – ideally from an accounting background with experience of charities if possible. An advert will go out shortly.

This concluded Trustee matters.

Appointment of auditors

We all agree that Maynard Heady have done a fantastic job and are very reasonable in terms of costs. We are happy to work with them again. Paul Bridges proposed the motion, and Lucy Norman seconded. All agreed to re appointment Maynard Heady as auditors.

Members' experiences

Matt then handed over to member Lynn. Lynn shared her personal story of her life over the last 4 years, and circumstances which led to challenging experiences. She was referred to Trust Links via a social prescriber and spoke to a staff member about stress and anxiety as she felt isolated at the time. She began attending groups and enjoyed the kindness and support of the staff and having a welcome distraction. She also used Therapy 4U but did not find it helpful. She began to help other members at Trust Links. She then decided to become a peer supporter and worked in co-production. She found group peer support very beneficial. She is now 61 and so proud of how far she has come and proud to be a peer and she thanked Trust Links for changing her life.

Member Hayley then shared a poem about her experiences.

JB thanked both members for sharing their thoughts and stories.

Earlier in the year, we shared our services with the Deputy Lieutenant who enjoyed the members powerful stories and it's what makes us do what we do so thank you.

Events and Fundraising

Matt provided an overview of upcoming events and fundraising activities. An information pack has been provided today to showcase what we are undertaking in the upcoming months to include:

- Barn dance at Ecko Club
- Icicle dip at Chalkwell beach November
- Cycle challenge in March – participants can cycle either 50k, 75k or 100k around rural Essex
- Jazz night in Southend Twenty One bar - 20th November – last gig by music group Daisy Bowlers.

Our 2025 events are also noted in this pack, as well as our usual annual events.

The Gunny building work launches 29th November - it will be a morning of tree planting, and we shall launch the building works. We also have our Basildon Community Fayre on June 28th. Member Chris suggested that we need volunteers for this event – and to do it more as a family event.

Please browse pack for all our events. All our challenges are on the back of the pack.

- Three peaks challenge
- Golf day
- Sky diving

- O2 challenge
- London half marathon

Maurice and Matt undertook Snowdon earlier this year along with other staff, volunteers, members and supporters. Matt then shared a video of the Snowdon challenge. We raised £14k from this challenge.

JB then thanked all trustees, and everyone who took part in this event, reiterating that fabulous leadership was shown.

Q and A

JB then opened the floor for a final Q&A.

Member Chris asked if it would be possible to access Trust Links services three days a week ie Mon, Weds, Friday with just a day in between? This might help the NHS out as well, as it's currently difficult to get a doctor's appointment.

Matt said that the challenge is having enough staff to manage the capacity, and there lots of different ways that people can engage with Trust Links but also we don't want people to be reliant on us; we would like members to explore what else is out there the community, there are other things going on, its working with the peers, with the staff to work out what else is there? People can also create their own peer or friendship groups etc. This is how people can grow out of us and find other support in the community. Further discussion ensued about what else is out there in the community for members.

JB added there will always be more demand than we can meet. We are limited in our staffing and our sites and our funding etc. For example, REACH has a waiting list of approximately 900 people.

Our Listening Together project is for sharing all these insights and information etc. JB thanked Chris for his question and insight.

No further comments or questions.

Vote of Thanks

JB extended one more thank you – thanks to Paul Bridges for his service as trustee. He will be stepping down end of year. Matt said Paul has been of great value and his coaching and helping Matt with processes and work legalities, contracts etc. We are very grateful for his expertise, and we will really miss him.

JB concluded there was no further business and brought the meeting to a formal close at 3.45pm and thanked all for coming.

