



Impact Report 2025/2026

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Two Jelly Volunteers smiling

Welcome

The past year has been one of growth, recognition and community impact for Exeter Community Initiatives.



**Portraits of Mark Goodwin, Chair of Trustees,
and Ellie Taylor, Chief Executive**

Across our services, we have continued to respond to local needs and create opportunities for people of all ages to connect, thrive and reach their potential.

A key milestone was the expansion of Magic Carpet, including welcoming D'Arts, a creative arts project for adults with additional needs, and launching a new drama group at Positive Lights, supported by the National Lottery and the D'Oyly Carte Charitable Foundation. Our work was also recognised through a Chamber Member Award at the Exeter Chamber Impact Awards, alongside further finalist and award nominations.

We continued to strengthen communities across Exeter and Devon: organising Exeter's largest Volunteer Fair at Exeter Cathedral, attracting more than 900 visitors and 70 organisations; relaunching Transitions with new workshops and meet-ups; securing further funding for Family Resource; celebrating Jelly's transformation with a mural by Exeter artist Chloe Farrant; and laying the foundations for Custard Town, a new inclusive play space in Exeter.

None of this would have been possible without the generosity of our supporters, partners, volunteers and funders. Their commitment enables us to make a meaningful difference, and as we reflect on another year of resilience, kindness and progress, we look forward to building on this impact in the year ahead.

With best wishes,

Mark Goodwin (Chair of Trustees) and Ellie Taylor (Chief Executive)

Who We Are

Since 1993, Exeter Community Initiatives has worked alongside people and communities in Exeter where support was needed most.

We have created and grown projects that respond to real local needs, particularly where people are facing disadvantage, isolation or gaps in existing services.

Over the last 33 years, our purpose has remained the same, but the way we deliver it has evolved. Some of our initiatives have grown into successful charities in their own right, while others have come to a natural end when their funding concluded. We do this work through our 5 community initiatives:



A team of 8 Community Builders works across neighbourhoods in Exeter, bringing residents together.



Our Family Support team offer practical advice, guidance and tailored support to children aged 0–18 and their families.



Our award-winning children's charity shop, providing affordable items to children and families.

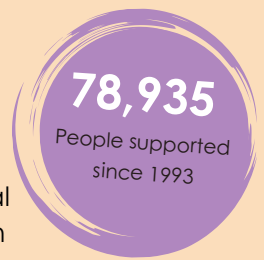


Uses creative arts, including art and drama, to support adults with learning disabilities and mental health challenges.



Supports adults by providing free workshops, one-to-one coaching and peer support, helping them build confidence and connections.

What We Do



Throughout the 2025/2026 year, we provided practical and non-judgemental support and guidance on both a 1-1 basis and as a family unit.

We work alongside people, helping them to feel in control and equipped to manage their lives.

We have provided safe spaces for people to access support, resources and activities. Our workshops, charity shop and events offer people an opportunity to build connections, belonging, confidence, routine and independence.

We share information and knowledge through various routes, including co-hosting the Devon Connect volunteer platform, hosting the annual Exeter Volunteer Fair, and through our staff team, who use their knowledge and networks to signpost services and opportunities across the county.

Community connection is built through our conversations and communications, our trusted relationships, asset-based community development (ABCD) work, and the array of events we run and attend within our community.



Our Services Manager and Magic Carpet participant smiling

Why We Do It

Vision

Our aspiration is a vibrant, connected community, where everyone feels included, valued, and able to live happy, healthy, and fulfilling lives. We envision communities where people work together, and have access to the support, knowledge, and opportunities they need to thrive.

Mission

We work alongside individuals, and communities, building on their strengths, by providing accessible support, learning, and growth in safe spaces. We foster meaningful connections, and offer resources that enhance resilience, wellbeing, and engagement in community life.

Values

Inclusive - We promote a culture where everyone can contribute, people are valued for their differences and services are available to everyone.

Trusted - We are authentic, committed to our mission and always act with integrity.

Innovative - We are responsive to new ideas, develop and leverage our talent and collaborate to create new ways of meeting need.

People Centred - People and their needs are at the heart of what we do.



“

Just having someone who understood, who would listen and say 'no wonder you feel that way' made such a difference.

”

Our Impact in Numbers

2025-2026



18,884

people worked with
across Exeter &
Devon



20,602

Hours of support
recieved



76 Families
supported.

and



100%

Felt heard



5,746

Residents
supported by
Community Builders
to move their ideas
into action

241

Ideas turned
into action



141

People took part
in workshops

806



hours of creative
workshops
delivered



60
3050 hrs

Volunteers
gave



Equating to

£41,022

(based on Real Living Wage
at £13.45 /hr)

78,935
People supported
since 1993



“ Magic Carpet is somewhere I can go
on my own. Somewhere I belong. ”

Magic Carpet participants stand
together beneath a colourful
outdoor canopy, celebrating
creativity and belonging.



Our Projects

Community Builders

Community Builders work alongside local people to help them make connections, develop ideas and create positive change in their communities. By listening to what matters to residents and supporting them to take the next step, they help people feel more connected, involved and confident.

Our year in numbers



What Impact have we had?

Community Builders start with conversation. Throughout the year, thousands of conversations helped residents explore what mattered to them, discover opportunities and build connections within their local communities.

Of the **645** new ideas generated during the year, **285** were turned into action. Community Builders also helped **1,692** residents connect with a new group or activity, opening doors to new experiences, friendships and opportunities to get involved.

The impact can be seen in the stories of residents who have moved from feeling isolated to feeling connected and confident in their communities.



A story of connection

After losing her husband and spending years caring for her father, one resident described feeling isolated and lacking confidence. A chance connection with her local Community Builder through a Pinhoe walking group helped her take the first steps back into community life.

With encouragement and introductions to local groups and activities, she began reconnecting with people and discovering new interests. She now attends museum meet-ups, craft groups and a book group, has joined the RAMM Community Panel and regularly meets friends old and new.

The difference our Community Builders make goes beyond the numbers, showing just how vital their work is in bringing people together and strengthening our communities.

"Several months later, I feel alive again, much more 'ME'."



Community members and volunteers in high-visibility vests walk together along a leafy path.

Proudly delivered by

Funded by



Family Resource

Family Resource works alongside parents and children affected by crime and domestic abuse, and the challenges this can create in family life. Through practical, emotional and trauma-informed support, we help families feel safer, more confident and better equipped to lead calm, happy family lives.

The Family Resource Project offers tailored support to parents and children across Devon and Cornwall, including support around neurodivergence, school attendance, mental health and trauma stabilisation.

Our Year in numbers

76

Families
Supported

146

People
Supported

2,969.5

Hours of
Support

"I feel more
confident,
happier and
more at
peace."

A young child smiles while taking
part in an activity

100%
Families felt
heard

The difference we made

78% said they had more tools or headspace to manage their own or their children's emotions.

78% said they had more hope for their own and/or their family's future.

78% felt they had a plan of action going forward and the confidence to work with it.

What families told us

"My son couldn't leave the house when we started working together. Now he gets the bus into Exeter, he's going to college and socialising. He's doing sleepovers — it's really good."

89%

Better able to
manage

"I have a better connection with my children now. I recognise my own boundaries and I feel confident making decisions. I have much more peace with difficult experiences I have had. I am much happier in myself and about my situation."

From feeling overwhelmed to feeling heard, supported and confident. Families told us that advocacy with schools and other services, improved family relationships and greater confidence were some of the biggest differences made through Family Resource support.

In partnership with



Funded by



Magic Carpet

Magic Carpet brings together creative practitioners and adults with learning disabilities and mental health difficulties through weekly art and drama groups. By making creativity accessible to all, the project provides opportunities to develop skills, build confidence, meet people and feel a sense of belonging.

Our year in numbers

124

People accessed
Magic Carpet

3,033

Attendances
across the year

806

Hours of creative
workshops
delivered

Magic Carpet is about more than attending a weekly session. Throughout the year, participants had opportunities to share their creativity, try something new and connect with others through three drama performances, two theatre trips, visits to Killerton and RAMM, and seasonal parties in collaboration with The Pelican Project.



A long, colourful mural featuring a variety of painted designs and patterns.

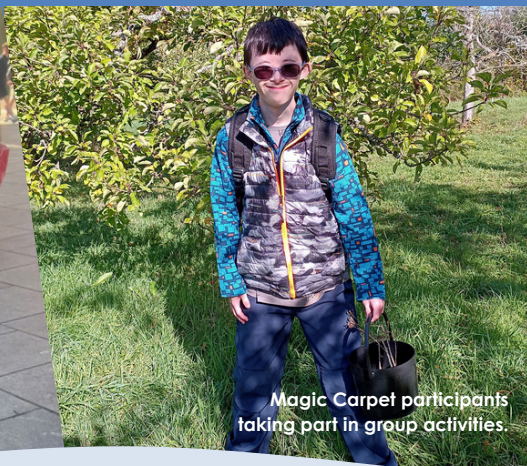
The difference we made

For some participants, the impact of Magic Carpet can be seen in a growing sense of confidence and independence. Matthew joined the Story into Art group and at first, he found creating artwork from his imagination difficult and needed encouragement to get started. Over time, he became more confident, began filling whole pages of his sketchbook and developed into a valued member of the group.

Recently, Matthew has performed at an open mic night and given a solo dance performance. His artwork has also been celebrated beyond the weekly sessions, including being featured in the Story into Art Calendar 2025.

*"It's somewhere I
can go on my
own. Somewhere I
belong." -
Matthew*

Matthew's story shows that the impact of creative support can extend far beyond the artwork itself. With the right encouragement and a welcoming environment, creativity can help people build confidence, develop independence and find a place where they feel they belong. To read Matthews story [click here](#).



Magic Carpet participants
taking part in group activities.

Funded by



Jelly

Jelly is our award winning children's charity shop in Exeter that sells preloved, high-quality items at affordable prices.

Every sale helps raise vital funds for ECI, while giving families access to affordable preloved children's and maternity items. Alongside generating income, Jelly brings people together through volunteering and gives donated items a new life in the local community.

Our year in numbers

31,524

Items stocked
for the community

2,911

Bags of donations
recieved

1,674

Volunteer Hours
contributed

"Jelly isn't just
second-hand — it's
second chances
for families like
mine."

Two people smile while displaying soft
toys in Jelly, ECI's children's charity shop.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a blue denim jacket and a black scarf, is smiling at the camera. She is standing in a shop filled with various donated items, including colorful clothing and bags. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the shop's interior.

14

Volunteers give
their time to help
at Jelly

Jelly volunteer, stands in the shop
surrounded by donated items

The difference we made

It is a simple cycle with a wider impact: local people donate, local people shop, volunteers make it happen, and the income helps ECI support local communities.

Hasena volunteers at Jelly, here is her story.

"When I first started volunteering at Jelly, I wanted to gain work experience and practice my English. Since then, I've not only improved my speaking skills but also grown in confidence. The team at Jelly has supported me so much, especially Dawn, my manager, who I now consider a good friend. Volunteering means a lot to me as it gives me the opportunity to support my community, meet new people and learn new skills. I hope that the experience I've gained will eventually help me find paid employment."

To start your volunteer journey, [click here](#).

Transitions

Transitions supports adults who are experiencing isolation, vulnerability or significant life changes. Through workshops, coaching, peer support and opportunities to connect with others, the project helps people build confidence, develop life skills and take positive steps towards their goals.

159

People supported

141

People took part in workshops

156

Hours of one to one coaching

Transitions creates different ways for people to connect and build confidence. During the year, **85 people took part in buddying, meet-ups or peer support**. The project delivered **71** workshops, providing **177.5** hours of workshop support, alongside **156** hours of one-to-one coaching. Participants were supported to access opportunities beyond Transitions, with **89** people attending workshops run by other agencies. Our partners this year have been Exmouth CMHT, Step One, Exeter PCN, Honiton PCN, Amicus (Tiverton PCN) and YMCA.

126

Felt less likely to need social care after attending workshops

A woman smiles outdoors, photographed against a leafy background.



A man smiles outdoors as he listens, photographed against a leafy background.

58

People increased
their life skills

The difference we made

For people experiencing isolation or facing a period of change, having someone alongside them can be the first step towards reconnecting with themselves, their community and their future.

Without Transitions, adults experiencing isolation or significant life changes could be left without the support, confidence or connections they need to move forward. They may miss out on opportunities to develop life skills, manage their wellbeing and build meaningful relationships, leaving them feeling more isolated and less able to take positive steps towards their goals.

"Meeting people who share the same difficulties makes you feel less isolated. I have found it very helpful and I wish I had had something like this a long time ago."

"Transitions hasn't just helped me rebuild my life—it's helped me believe in it again."

Funded by



In partnership with





Visitors explore information stands at Exeter Volunteer Fair inside Exeter Cathedral.

"Some days I feel like I've gained so much more than I give."
— ECI Transitions Volunteer

Volunteering

Our volunteers are an essential part of ECI, bringing energy, skills and compassion to everything we do. They help us strengthen communities, support our projects and create opportunities for people to connect. Through training, social meet-ups and shared experiences, volunteers build confidence, develop skills and find a sense of belonging. They become part of a community where they are valued, supported and encouraged to grow.

We were proud to deliver our 5th annual Exeter Volunteer Fair in April 2025 at the magnificent Exeter Cathedral. The event saw over **70** VCSE organisations and **900** visitors in attendance.

We continue to provide the Exeter page of Devon Connect, an online platform for people and organisations to advertise and find volunteering opportunities and not-for-profit events within their area. We have contributed to more than **£600,000** in social value, alongside a network of **5,000+** members and **2,445+** community activities.

To become a volunteer and find out more, [click here](#).

Our People

At ECI, our team of 35 paid staff, 50 volunteers and 10 Trustees has worked with dedication and creativity to stand alongside individuals and families, helping build stronger, more resilient communities.

Our trustee board this year has been led by Mark Goodwin, with Caroline Lake as Vice-Chair and Mark Hodgson as Treasurer. We have been fortunate to have John Barrett, Natalie Vizard, Sheila Swarbrick, Mia Day, Emerald Hughes, Stephanie Monks and Corrinne Whiteley as Trustees throughout the year 2025/26.

If you would like to become a trustee, [click here](#).

"Finding a role that reflects my values has been a dream come true."

Sam - Finance



ECI staff stand together outside a building for a group photograph.

Looking Forward 2027

As community needs continue to evolve, so will we. Over the coming year, we'll build on more than 30 years of supporting people across Exeter and Devon, focusing on what matters most: helping people overcome challenges, strengthen connections and play an active role in their communities. Based on the priorities set out in our 2025 Strategy, we remain committed to being a trusted, responsive and collaborative charity that puts people at the heart of everything we do.

Our priorities for the year ahead are to:

- Reach more individuals, families and communities who can benefit from our support.
- Ensure our values guide every decision we make, creating services that are inclusive, people-centred, trusted and responsive to local need.
- Invest in the wellbeing, skills and development of our staff and volunteers so they can continue to make a meaningful difference.
- Strengthen and support the wider Exeter VCSE sector, working alongside charities, community groups and partners to share knowledge, build capacity and tackle challenges collectively.
- Develop sustainable income and strong partnerships that enable our services to grow and remain available for the long term.
- Embrace innovation and new ways of working, including digital tools and technology, where they can help us better serve our communities.

None of this can be achieved alone. The support of funders, donors, volunteers, partners and local businesses enables us to continue responding to community needs and creating opportunities for people to thrive.



Two Magic Carpet Participants smiling and creating artwork

If you share our vision for a stronger, more connected Exeter, we'd love you to be part of the journey. Whether you support, fund, partner with or champion our work, together we can create lasting change in our communities

Scan the QR code to donate today.



How can you get involved?



Volunteer

Join our team of volunteers.



Community Fundraiser

Raise funds yourself or in a team.



One-Off Donation

By cheque to 'Exeter Community Initiatives' or online.



Friend of ECI

Through our scheme you can make a regular longer term donation.



Leave a Gift in your Will

Make a lasting impact or remember a loved one.



Newsletter

Sign up for newsletter updates and share on socials.

Thank you for all your support.

To find out more, visit www.eci.org.uk



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