

ERCA

Christmas Newsletter 2025

Providers of Mental Health Support and Respite



Service News

Welcome to our Christmas newsletter and what a year it has been. ERCA turned 30 marking a real milestone for the charity, we also welcomed our new Chairman, Bob Barclay, along with two new trustees. Their experience and insights will be invaluable as we continue our mission.

You may have noticed our fresh new look—our updated logo is part of an exciting rebranding project. Early next year, we will be launching our brand-new website, designed to showcase everything we do in a clearer, more accessible way.



We have been busier than ever, spreading the word about the services we provide and making a real difference in our community. Like many charities, we are feeling the financial squeeze and facing challenges in raising the vital funds that keep our work going. Later in this newsletter, Co-Manager Jemma shares her perspective on the obstacles we face and what we're doing to keep the Charity thriving - Thank you for being part of our journey—your support means the world to us!

For those of you who follow us on Facebook, you may have noticed that we've been busy attending a variety of community events including The Age Well Fair and UFest to name a few.



These events not only help raise the profile of the Charity but also provide valuable opportunities for networking and connecting with new clients & carers. Over the coming year, we'll be attending more events, so be sure to keep an eye on our Facebook page for the latest updates and ways to get involved!



ERCA has been chosen as one of the beneficiaries of the New Year Concert, organised by the Rotary Club of Chelmer Bridge. This event takes place on 3rd January at Chelmsford Cathedral. Tickets cost £15 for adults and £5 for children (under 16). To purchase tickets, please contact Graham by email at grahamjmarsh@btinternet.com

On 8th December, we held our annual Safeguarding Training. The day was a great success and was expertly facilitated by Jon from My Own Mentor Ltd. Following the training, we celebrated with our annual Staff and Trustee Christmas Meal, which this year took place at The Griffin in Danbury. A big thank you to all staff and trustees who joined us for both events—it was wonderful to come together and celebrate the year's achievements!

Featured in this issue:

- Service News
- Fundraising
- Donations
- Getting involved
- Charity Matters
- Chairmans message
- Where to find us

Find us on

ERCA





Service News cont.....

On 16th December, we hosted our annual Client and Carer Gathering, a wonderful opportunity to bring our clients and carers together and celebrate some festive cheer! The day was filled with music, dancing, a fun quiz, and a raffle. A huge thank you to everyone who attended, a special thanks to our talented singer Olivia for adding a magical touch, and to Aimee for hosting the Christmas quiz so brilliantly!



Fundraising



This year, we've been getting our walking shoes on again to raise vital funds for our activities budget. Staff and clients took part in The Funwalk Challenge and together raised over £1,000! A big well done to everyone who took part, and a special thank you to The Fun Walk Trust, who every year go above and beyond to ensure the bonus pot grows. Your support makes a real difference—thank you!

Fundraising - The Growing Challenge of Keeping Our Services Running – Jemma (co-manager)

If anyone asks me if I enjoy my role I would quickly say yes, I love my job at ERCA because I am proud of the difference we all make to our client's lives and it is rewarding being able to help others. However, there is one aspect of the job that is difficult—fundraising.

When direct payments were introduced in 2012, there was no choice but to begin charging an hourly rate. Even so, the charity still subsidises every hour of support our dedicated team provides.

We rely on grants, trusts, donations, and year-round fundraising to cover this gap and to run our activities programme, which helps clients connect with their communities, build confidence, and improve their wellbeing.

Securing funding has always been difficult, and since COVID it has become even harder. Economic uncertainty, shifting donor priorities, and increased competition mean we must devote increasing time preparing detailed applications.

Since Gemma joined as my co-manager in June 2023, we've often talked about how we can do more for people living with mental illness. We hope to create a benevolent fund for those who can't afford support and, one day, open a hub offering mental-health sessions and a safe place for carers to leave their loved ones for a much-needed break.

But these aspirations require funding we simply don't have. Rising employer National Insurance contributions and higher wage costs have pushed our staffing expenses even higher. Just to keep our current service running, we need to secure over £40,000 this year—an amount that keeps me awake at night.





Fundraising cont...

If we cannot meet this target, we may face heartbreaking decisions—scaling back the support we offer or even closing the charity altogether. For the families who rely on us, this would be a devastating loss.

I spend a great deal of time applying for funding, but with so many organisations competing for fewer grants, the chances of success are often slim. Each “we’re unable to support your request” is disheartening, though we’re grateful for the grants we have received this year from The Tula Trust, Augustine Courtauld, The Edward Gostling Foundation, The D’Oyly Carte Charitable Trust, and Mrs Smith & Mount. We simply need more support to survive.

Your contribution big or small can make a real difference. You can help by organising a sponsored walk or run, hosting a bake sale, quiz night or coffee morning, or creating a fundraising page on JustGiving or GoFundMe to mark a birthday, a challenge, or a loved one’s memory.

You might also consider leaving a gift to ERCA in your will; even a small legacy can have a lasting impact. If you have a fundraising idea, a skill to offer, a helpful connection, or are considering a gift in your will, we’d love to hear from you. Please drop us an email at office@essexrespite.org.uk

Donations

If you would like to make a donation to our charity you can visit our page at:
www.justgiving.com/essexrespite



You can also sign up to our easyfundraising to support our charity. You can find the link on our Facebook or head to:
www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/erca/



Get involved

Do you have some spare time? Perhaps you’re looking for a way to make a real difference in your local community?

If you have administration skills, website development experience, or a background in Health and Social Care, we would love to hear from you! We are always looking for volunteers to help out in the office—or even to join our Board of Trustees. Your skills and time could make a huge impact, so please give us a call to find out how you can get involved.

Charity Matters

Christmas, although a happy time for many, can also be a hard time for lots of people too.

We want to remind everyone, whether you celebrate Christmas or not, if at any point over the holiday season you feel down or lonely to reach out for help. Below are some useful numbers:



Charity Matters cont...



- **Samaritans** are open over Christmas to call for free, day or night, on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org.
- **Mind's** helpline provide information and support by phone and email. Their line is open Monday to Friday, 10am to 6pm. It will be closed on 25 and 26 December 2024, and 1 January 2025.
- **No panic**, helping/supporting people who live with panic attacks, phobia's, OCD & other anxiety related disorders. Help line open 365 days a year 10am - 10pm 0300 772 9844.

Ways to help your wellbeing over the festive period

- 1. Keep Expectations Realistic** - It's okay if the festive season doesn't feel magical or exciting. Be kind to yourself and focus on what feels manageable, not what you feel pressured to do.
- 2. Maintain a Simple Routine** - Try to keep a steady pattern of, sleeping, eating and gaining exercise. Make sure you take your medication as prescribed. Structure can help your mood stay more stable.
- 3. Stay Connected** - Connection doesn't have to mean big gatherings. Sometimes a short visit, a message, or a phone call with someone you trust can make a real difference.
- 4. Be Open About How You're Feeling** - If you feel comfortable, talk to someone you trust. Sharing how you feel can reduce feelings of isolation and help you feel supported.
- 5. Create Your Own Festive Moments** - Choose activities that feel comforting rather than overwhelming, such as watching a favourite film, listening to music or doing something creative.
- 6. Get Fresh Air** - A short walk or stepping outside for a few minutes can lift your mood and clear your mind.
- 7. Practise Simple Mindfulness or Grounding** - Slow breathing, a short meditation, or jotting down your thoughts can help reduce emotional overwhelm.
- 8. Be Kind to Yourself** - Self-care isn't selfish. Rest when you need to, take things at your own pace, and treat yourself with the same kindness you'd offer others.



Chairmans Message



Dear Friends, Supporters, Volunteers and Staff,

As the year draws to a close and we enter this season of goodwill, I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to all who have supported ERCA throughout the past twelve months. Your generosity of spirit and steadfast commitment have enabled us to continue our mission of serving those most in need.

Christmas is a time of reflection as well as celebration. It reminds us of the values of compassion, unity, and hope—principles that lie at the very heart of our work. Thanks to your contributions, we have been able to provide vital assistance, bring comfort to the vulnerable, and strengthen the bonds of community that sustain us all.

This year has not been without its challenges, yet together we have achieved much. The dedication of our volunteers, the kindness of our donors, and the trust of those we serve inspire us to look forward with renewed determination.

This year saw a significant milestone for ERCA as we celebrated our 30th anniversary. For three decades, we've proudly supported carers and their loved ones across Essex, and I extend a heartfelt thank you to our community, Support Staff and volunteers for their dedication over this period. In addition, we unveiled our refreshed logo and website.

As we welcome the New Year, let us remain steadfast in our resolve to extend a hand of friendship and support to all who face hardship. May the blessings of Christmas bring peace to your homes, joy to your families, and hope for the days ahead.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and all those within ERCA, I wish you a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

With sincere appreciation,

Bob Barclay
Chairman

Where to find us

To keep up to date with ERCA you can follow us on Facebook:

Essex Respite & Care Association

Or

Visit our website at www.essexrespite.org.uk

If you, or anyone you know, would like to join us as a volunteer head to our website to get in contact!

