

Spring 2026 newsletter

# Celebrating connection through Links in Essex



Hamelin brought together volunteers, participants and partners to celebrate the growing success of our Links befriending service across Essex.

The event showcased the powerful impact of connection, helping autistic adults and people with learning disabilities build confidence, friendships and a stronger sense of belonging.

See pages 10-11 for more.

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# Welcome

Welcome to the spring 2026 edition of Hamelin's newsletter. We're delighted to share some of the inspiring stories, achievements and experiences that have taken place across our services in recent months.

This edition celebrates the power of connection, opportunity and self-expression. One of our highlights is the continued success of Links, our befriending service which is helping autistic adults and people with learning disabilities build friendships, confidence and stronger connections within their communities. We recently brought together participants, volunteers and partners to celebrate the impact the service is having across Essex and to look ahead to its future growth (p. 10-11).

We are also proud to showcase the many ways people are developing new skills and exploring future opportunities. Participants on our Ability Works programme welcomed a Ford apprentice who shared her career journey and offered valuable insight into the world of work, helping to inspire confidence and ambition for the future (p. 3).

The voices and experiences of the people we support continue to shape meaningful change. Participants involved in the Moving Forward programme used their lived experience to create a powerful presentation about autism, encouraging greater understanding, inclusion and respect within our communities (p. 6).

There has been plenty of fun and celebration too. Guests and families came together for a memorable Easter event at Gowlands, while people supported by Hamelin enjoyed new experiences through community visits, including a fascinating trip to the Essex Fire Museum (p. 4 and 7).

Creativity has also been flourishing across our services. A special art session with artist David Kirkman provided an opportunity for people to express themselves, explore emotions and share experiences through abstract art in a supportive environment (p. 9).

As always, we are incredibly grateful to our supporters, volunteers, partners and staff whose dedication makes all of this possible. We hope you enjoy reading about the achievements, experiences and positive impact taking place across Hamelin, and feel proud of the difference we are making together every day.

The Hamelin Communications Team  
[comms@hamelin.org.uk](mailto:comms@hamelin.org.uk)

# Inspiring future careers with Ford

Participants on our Ability Works programme were given an insight into the world of work during a recent visit from a Ford apprentice.

Charlotte Gill, a Product Development Degree Apprentice based at Ford's Dunton site, joined a session in Rochford to share her journey and talk about opportunities within the automotive industry.

Charlotte spoke about her current role working on electric vehicle technology, giving participants a glimpse into a fast-changing and innovative sector. She also shared practical advice on applying for jobs and preparing for interviews.

Importantly, she highlighted the support available for neurodivergent employees, helping to build confidence and encourage participants to think about their own career paths.

Charlotte said: "Hopefully I was able to inspire at least one person to consider a career in the automotive industry."

The session gave everyone the chance to ask questions, learn from real experience and explore new possibilities for the future.

Markie Musilova, Employment Manager, added: "Visits like this are incredibly valuable in helping to inspire confidence and broaden horizons."

**Read the full story on our website at [www.hamelin.org.uk/news](http://www.hamelin.org.uk/news)**



# Bringing history to life at the Essex Fire Museum

Some of the people we support in Billericay recently enjoyed a visit to the Essex Fire Museum in Grays, discovering the history of the fire service in Essex.

The visit offered a fascinating look at how firefighting has changed over the years, with a unique collection of historic fire engines, equipment, uniforms and photographs bringing the story to life.

There were also plenty of opportunities to get involved, with people trying on equipment and sitting in some of the vehicles, making it a truly hands-on experience.

Alongside exploring the past, the group also learned practical fire safety tips, helping to build confidence and awareness in everyday situations. Visits like this provide valuable opportunities to learn new things, try different experiences and enjoy time together in the community.





# Changing perceptions of autism through lived experience



Participants on our Ability Works programme have been using their own experiences to help others better understand autism.

As part of the 'Moving Forward' programme delivered by the Centre for International Learning and Leadership, the group created a presentation exploring how they see and experience the world.

Using video, sound and artwork, the group shared what everyday life can feel like and what can make a positive difference. A key message running through their work is to 'not make it a thing', encouraging people to move beyond labels and focus on understanding and respect.

The project was showcased at a special event attended by friends, family and local dignitaries, including Bayo Alaba, MP for Southend East and Rochford who presented certificates to mark their achievements. He praised the programme and highlighted the importance of recognising the skills and potential of autistic adults and people with learning disabilities.

Alongside developing practical skills, the group built confidence, teamwork and a strong sense of shared purpose. They are now keen to use their work to raise awareness and promote more inclusive communities.

Lisa Webb, Employment Support Co-ordinator, said: "This project is about opening minds and encouraging people to think differently about how inclusive their environments really are."

**Read the full story on our website at [www.hamelin.org.uk/news](http://www.hamelin.org.uk/news)**

# Easter celebrations at Gowlands



Gowlands welcomed guests and families for a fun-filled Easter celebration, bringing everyone together for a day of activities, entertainment and community spirit.

We were delighted to be joined by the Mayor of Southend, alongside a visit from Essex therapy dogs, making the day even more special for those attending.

There was plenty to enjoy throughout the event, including games and activities, a raffle, and a delicious barbecue, as well as lots of sweet chocolate treats.

Guests also enjoyed music from our very own resident DJ Joe, who kept the celebrations going and created a great atmosphere.

Events like this are a wonderful opportunity for our guests and their families to come together and have fun.



# Creative expression through art

We were delighted to welcome artist David Kirkman to Billericay for a creative session with some of the people we support in Billericay.

Using abstract art, the session encouraged people to explore feelings and emotions in a relaxed and supportive environment. It was a chance to try something new, express themselves freely and enjoy the process without pressure.

David, an Essex-based artist known for his bold and expressive work, also shared his own lived experience as an autistic person. This brought an added sense of connection and understanding to the session, making it even more meaningful for those taking part.

Creative opportunities like this are about more than making art. They help build confidence, support self-expression and create positive, shared experiences.

Thank you to David for sharing his time, talent and inspiring approach.



# Links helps communities thrive

Hamelin recently brought together volunteers, participants and partners to celebrate the continued success of our Links befriending service across mid and south Essex.

The showcase event welcomed people supported by the service alongside volunteers, commissioners and local partners. It was also an opportunity to thank the National Lottery, whose funding has supported the programme's growth.

Currently running in Braintree, Chelmsford and Basildon, Links is helping autistic adults and people with learning disabilities to build friendships, grow in confidence and feel more connected to their communities. Plans are already in place to expand into new areas over the coming years.

Visitors heard first-hand about the difference Links is making through a series of powerful video stories from participants and volunteers.

Ru Watkins, Chief Executive, said: "Links is all about connection, confidence and community. We are seeing first-hand how bringing people together through shared interests can have a lasting impact on people's lives."

The service began as a pilot funded by Essex County Council, which quickly showed strong demand and a clear need for more community-based support.

As well as celebrating success, the event created space for partners to come together, strengthening relationships and supporting more joined up working across Essex.

**Read the full story on our website at [www.hamelin.org.uk/news](http://www.hamelin.org.uk/news)**





# Make a smile lottery

When you play **make a smile lottery**, you are doing something amazing. Not only are you in with the chance to win cash prizes every week, but you are also helping to raise funds for Hamelin!

For only **£1 per play**, you can be in with the chance of winning the weekly top prize of £1,000. There are 281 other weekly prizes up for grabs - 1 x £200, 10 x £10, 270 x £5, plus a rollover prize. The rollover goes up by £500 every week and should it not be won, rolls over to a maximum of £25,000!

You can get single tickets or set up a recurring subscription. Find out more at [www.makeasmilelottery.org.uk/partners/hamelin](http://www.makeasmilelottery.org.uk/partners/hamelin)

## Win up to £25,000!

[www.makeasmilelottery.org.uk](http://www.makeasmilelottery.org.uk)



## You shop, Hamelin benefits

Did you know you can support Hamelin with your everyday purchases?

Over 7,000 brands will donate to us when you use easyfundraising to shop with them – at no extra cost to you!

All you need to do is sign up and remember to use easyfundraising whenever you shop online. It's easy and completely FREE! These donations really mount up, so please sign up to support us. Thank you.

The logo consists of a yellow sun with rays, positioned above the text 'Support us through easyfundraising'. The text is in a bold, sans-serif font, with 'Support us through' in a smaller size and 'easyfundraising' in a larger size. Two horizontal lines are drawn below the text.

Support us through  
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[www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/hamelintrust](http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/hamelintrust)

# Save the date!

## Golf day, Friday, 4th September

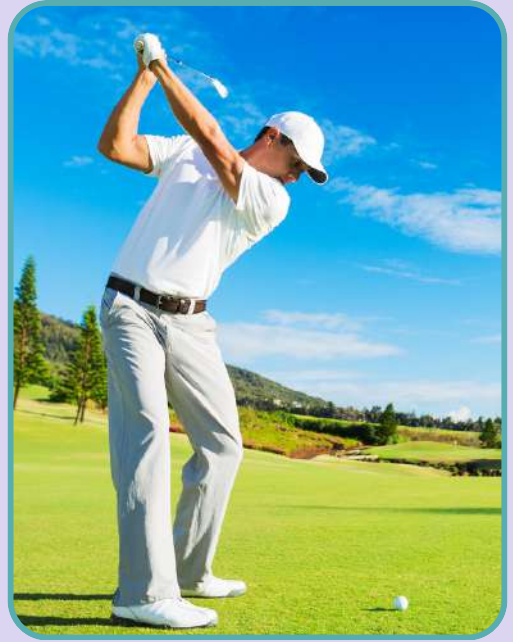
Hamelin is holding a golf day at Thorndon Park Golf Club. It's set to be a tee-rific day as competitors take on 18 holes and raise funds for our charity.

Breakfast and lunch is provided, plus there will be raffle, auction, nearest the pin and longest drive prizes.

- Breakfast and lunch provided
- £125 per person, teams of 4

Information:

[catarina.dias@hamelin.org.uk](mailto:catarina.dias@hamelin.org.uk)



## Billericay Fun Walk, Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> September

This much-loved annual event is a highlight of Hamelin's fundraising calendar, and we're delighted to be taking part once again this year.

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters and the enthusiasm of everyone involved, last year's event raised an incredible £2,537.21!

Further details about the day will be shared soon.

