

Winter 2026 newsletter

Hamelin joins national call for care reform



Hamelin took to the national stage in Westminster, joining charities from across the country to call for stronger support for social care.

The event helped ensure the voices of autistic people and adults with learning disabilities were heard at the highest level, including the powerful story of one of our Ability Works participants.

See pages 8-9 for more.

Also in this issue...

 **Expanding employment training**
page 3

 **Gowlands refurbishment**
page 7

 **First ASDAN qualifications**
page 5

 **Christmas tree collection success**
page 10

Welcome

Welcome to the winter 2026 edition of Hamelin's newsletter. We're delighted to share some of the inspiring moments, achievements and developments that have taken place across Hamelin in recent months.

This edition highlights the many ways our community continues to grow, advocate and celebrate success together. One important moment came when Hamelin joined charities from across the country outside the Treasury in Westminster to call for meaningful reform of the social care system, ensuring the voices of autistic people and adults with learning disabilities are heard at a national level (p. 8-9).

There has also been plenty to celebrate closer to home. Our supporters helped raise more than £2,500 through the Billericay Fun Walk, while our annual Christmas tree collection had a record year with 193 trees recycled and more than £3,800 raised for our services (p. 6, p. 10).

We are continuing to expand opportunities for the people we support. Our Ability Works employment sessions are now reaching more people in Castle Point, offering practical advice and support for those looking to move into work (p. 3). Meanwhile, we are proud to celebrate the first people at Hamelin completing ASDAN qualifications, an exciting milestone that opens the door to new skills, confidence and independence (p. 5).

Across our services there has been plenty of creativity and positive change. The bedrooms at Gowlands have been beautifully refurbished with vibrant city themes, creating a welcoming and uplifting space for short stays (p. 7). Our Hamelin chefs have also been busy in the kitchen, learning new skills while having plenty of fun along the way (p. 11).

As always, we are hugely grateful to our supporters, partners and volunteers who make all of this possible. We hope you enjoy reading about the progress and achievements across Hamelin, and feel proud of the difference your support helps to create every day.

The Hamelin Communications Team
comms@hamelin.org.uk

Employment sessions expanded

Following the success of our Ability Works employment support sessions in Rochford and Chelmsford, Hamelin has expanded the service to reach more people in Castle Point.

A new free weekly drop in now takes place at Canvey Island Jobcentre Plus, 140 Furtherwick Road, every Wednesday from 10am to 12.30pm, giving autistic adults and people with learning disabilities the opportunity to access tailored employment support without the need for an appointment. The sessions offer practical help with CV writing, talking through gaps in employment, building confidence, exploring work and volunteering opportunities, and receiving general advice about jobs and careers.

The expansion reflects the strong demand for the service and the positive outcomes already seen in other areas. It also marks an important step in reaching more people who face barriers to employment, helping them to develop the skills, confidence and experience needed to move towards meaningful work.



Former Chief Nursing Officer Dame Ruth May visits Hamelin

We were delighted to welcome Dame Ruth May to Hamelin to meet with our Chief Executive, Ru Watkins, and Director of Care, Shoenagh Mackay.

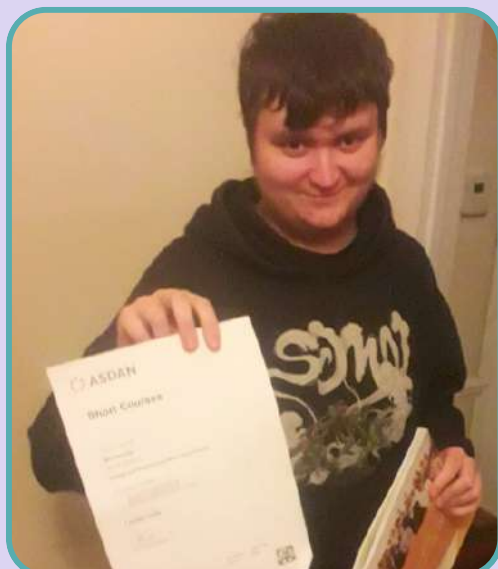
Dame Ruth, former Chief Nursing Officer for England, spent time with us talking about the future of the care workforce and how charities like ours can play a bigger role in shaping it. We shared ideas about how the NHS and the voluntary sector can work more closely together, learning from each other and sharing skills, experience and resources.

These conversations matter. By working together, we can help build a workforce drawn from all our communities that is better prepared, more inclusive and truly understands the needs of autistic people and adults with learning disabilities. We can also create clearer pathways for individuals to develop their careers across social care and health, in both voluntary and employed roles.

Thank you to Dame Ruth for such an open, thoughtful and collaborative discussion.



Celebrating first ASDAN success



Two people supported by Hamelin have become the first to complete an ASDAN qualification at the charity.

Ben and Matt successfully achieved the ASDAN Careers and Experiencing Work Short Course, marking the first courses delivered since Hamelin became an accredited ASDAN centre. Their achievement highlights an important step in creating meaningful learning and progression opportunities for autistic adults and people with learning disabilities.

Since gaining accreditation, Hamelin has begun offering a range of nationally recognised courses designed to build confidence, independence and employability. Following this initial success, more people are now working towards ASDAN qualifications in areas such as computing, careers and the world of work, environmental and horticulture, catering, and volunteering.

Hamelin's Head of Community, Sue Wray, described the milestone as a proud moment and a strong start to the charity's plans to expand learning opportunities.

The ASDAN accreditation was made possible thanks to funding from KBH Haus, and Hamelin now looks forward to supporting many more individuals to gain qualifications, develop new skills and take positive steps towards greater independence and meaningful employment.

Billericay Fun Walk success



We're delighted to share that Hamelin raised £1,879.21 in the Billericay Fun Walk.

Charities which took part came together at a celebration event toward the end of last year to mark their achievements and hear how much extra funding had been added through the shared bonus pot.

This bonus pot was generously supported by local businesses and distributed among all participating good causes. Hamelin received an additional £658, bringing our grand total to an impressive £2,537.21.

Thank you to everyone who took part, donated, and supported us. We are also grateful to the businesses and individuals who contributed to the bonus pot, and to the Fun Walk Trust team for organising such a wonderful event.



Fresh city look for Gowlands

A huge thank you to the B&Q Foundation and Neighbourly for generously funding the refurbishment of the bedrooms at our short stay centre, Gowlands, in Rochford.

Each room has been completely transformed with exciting city themes, including Barcelona, New York, London, and Sydney. The refurbishment has brought real colour and energy into the space, creating a welcoming and uplifting environment for everyone who stays with us.

Thanks to this funding, we were also able to upgrade our sensory space, enhancing the calming and supportive environment it provides for the people we support.

Our guests have already shared wonderful feedback, describing the new rooms as vibrant, fun, and exciting. We are incredibly grateful for the support, which has made such a positive difference to the experience of those who use our service.



Hamelin at the Treasury as part of national call for care reform

Hamelin joined charities from across the country in Westminster ahead of the Autumn budget in November to urge the government to prioritise social care.

While the event highlighted the importance of social care in all its forms, Hamelin attended to shine a light on the experiences of autistic people and adults with learning disabilities, and to call for investment that met their specific needs.

The day brought together members of the Care and Support Alliance outside the Treasury. A symbolic red case filled with personal testimonies was handed to the Chancellor, representing the figures that truly matter, the people whose lives are shaped by the support they receive. Among these stories was a pen portrait written by Matt, one of Hamelin's Ability Works participants.

Matt said he felt honoured to attend the event to represent Hamelin and the people the charity supports. He said: "It felt a bit surreal to have my story featured in the campaign, but it meant a lot to be able to speak up, not just for myself, but for others who are going through a similar situation.



“A few months ago I felt completely stuck and had no idea what to do next. Thanks to Hamelin’s Ability Works programme, things completely changed course. They helped me see my strengths again and encouraged me to look at cyber security, which I am now studying and genuinely enjoying. I honestly do not think I would have found this path without them.”

“I wanted to show that with the right understanding and support, people like me can do well. There are so many of us who just need a fair chance. That is why I was proud to take part in the event and call for proper social care reform.”

Across Essex there are more than 48,000 autistic adults and adults with learning disabilities. For many, social care means practical help to communicate, build confidence, develop routines, take part in the community or live safely at home. Hamelin used the event to emphasise that meaningful reform must recognise these needs and ensure that support is available, sustainable and person-centred.

Hamelin continues to advocate for a social care system that gives every autistic person and every adult with a learning disability the chance to thrive with the right help at the right moment.



Christmas tree collection

A huge thank you to everyone who supported our Just Helping Christmas tree fundraiser this year. It was a record year, with 193 trees collected and recycled, around double the number from 2025!

More than £3,800 was donated by the local community, which will make a real difference to our work creating opportunities for the people we support.

We are incredibly grateful to our fantastic volunteers who were out collecting trees, and to the local businesses who provided vehicles and extra helping hands to make it all possible. Thank you to Ford, World of Spice, Aureos, Clarke Infinity, Box Productions, Essex Fire Museum and Skye Cloud.



Hamelin chefs get creative

Our Hamelin chefs have been busy in the kitchen lately, having lots of fun and getting creative. They celebrated Shrove Tuesday by making pancakes and got stuck into National Pizza Day by creating their own.

These sessions are not just about having fun, they are also a great way to practise important skills for life. From building confidence and independence to learning teamwork, communication and how to follow instructions, there is so much happening alongside the cooking.

It is always a joy to see everyone in action, and it smells amazing whenever the Hamelin chefs are cooking up something tasty, especially when they get to enjoy what they have made themselves.



Can you help?

Support from people like you helps make these sessions possible. Just £10 can help pay for ingredients for a skills session, giving someone the chance to try something new and build confidence along the way.

Whether you make a one-off or regular donation, or fundraise with friends, it all helps support the skills sessions that mean so much to the people who take part. Thank you.

Donate today at www.hamelin.org.uk/support-us

‘Rising Star’ award

We’re delighted to announce that our communications lead, Martyn Dolton, has been named ‘Rising Star’ at the national Inspiring Communicator Awards (ICAs).

The ICAs, organised by Charity Comms, celebrate individuals whose work in charity communications goes above and beyond. Since joining us in September 2022, Martyn has developed our first communications strategy, launched a refreshed brand and a modern, accessible website, and built a thriving social media presence from scratch. His work has made a real difference, ensuring that families, supporters, and local businesses understand the full impact of Hamelin’s services.

The results speak for themselves: referrals to our services have grown from 137 in 2021 to 725 in 2024, while fundraising income has risen from £17,000 to £281,000, helping us reach and support far more families across our community.

Martyn said he was ‘absolutely delighted to win’.

He said: “The shortlist was full of impressive talent, so it is a real honour to be recognised. It’s incredibly humbling to see how my work is making a difference for some of the most vulnerable people in our society.”



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

Win up to £25,000!

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.



www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/hamelintrust