

Annual Report 2022–23

Together we're making health and social care better





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Photos clockwise: 1 - (L-R) Engagement Manager Dan fishing at iCARP with a veteran; 2 - Research Officer Lorna trying on glasses demonstrating vision impairments; 3 - Engagement Officer Renée leading an activity at an Accessible Information workshop; 4 - Research Manager Kate at Essex Pride; 5 - the Communication Team at our Beach Hut Day; 6 - Digital Marketing Apprentice Sam and Engagement Officer Mel playing hook-a-duck at the Beach Hut Day.

Front cover: Mel at Essex Pride.

A Note From Us...



As we move away from the immediate challenges of COVID, we face a new set of challenges. The 'Cost of Living' crisis has impacted on the residents and staff working within Essex. The voluntary sector is working harder than ever with scarce resources to support the health and social care system. The creation of the Integrated Care Boards and partnerships across Essex add both a layer of complexity and an opportunity to work in closer partnership.

This year we have been working on projects that continue to share the voices of our community. The Trauma Ambassador Group has grown in number and in reach, launching the Trauma Card to support those living with trauma access support in a range of settings.

Our Engagement team carried out a project looking at fertility experiences across the county. 'Happiness, Heartbreak and Hope' is the outcome of this work which shares the stories of those who have experienced baby loss, IVF and alternative fertility journeys.

The Research team was shortlisted for a HSJ award based on the work that was carried out in partnership with Mid and South Essex Foundation Trust to understand the challenges adults with learning disabilities face in accessing acute care. A range of resources have been co-designed to support professionals working within healthcare to better support adults with learning disabilities.

Our relationship with our neighbouring Healthwatch organisations has continued to grow and strengthen. Our Information and Guidance team are now co-commissioned to work with both Hertfordshire and Suffolk to gather and share insight from the community directly into the Integrated Care Boards. The topics explored have covered everything from menopause to mould and provides a unique insight into areas that matter to local residents.

All the work we carry out is for the impact of people living and working in Essex. Our brand awareness is now at least 38%, meaning more people know who we are and how we may be able to support them. We are growing in size and have been able to work across the system and support a wide range of projects ensuring lived experience is reaching those making decisions on health and social care in Essex.

Sam Glover, Healthwatch Essex Chief Executive Officer (CEO)



As Healthwatch Essex (HWE) has been recovering from the impact of the pandemic it has been really good to have our staff back at the office working together and attending face-to-face meetings with our colleagues, partners and the people living in our local communities. We have recruited more staff and been successful in securing lots of interesting projects from a wide range of partners.

The impact of the cost of living increases has affected everyone, and HWE staff have been there to offer information and guidance to many people. HWE will continue to support our staff to deal with the cost of living crisis and ensure their health and wellbeing with access to a range of support and advice. The worsening situation in terms of health and social care provision has had, and continues to have, a huge impact on the health and wellbeing of our local communities with increasing numbers seeking support and guidance from our teams.

Our Chief Executive has made a significant contribution to the establishment and implementation of the three local Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs) – working with local Healthwatch is key to understanding the lived experience of health and social care and enables the ICPs to develop their plans and priorities.

You will have read about the work that the team has done over the last year and their successes in the Chief Executive's report. Huge thanks to Sam, the CEO, and all her team at HWE in Information & Guidance, Research, Engagement and Communications for the exceptional work they have done and their amazing recovery from very challenging times. The Board of Directors is extremely proud of everyone in the team for their commitment and enthusiasm, and the vital work they undertake to ensure that lived experiences feed into improvements in health and social care. The information that we share enables providers to offer accessible and equitable care and support to meet the ever-increasing needs of people living in our communities.

During the year we have seen the departure from the Board of Celia Crossley, Lawrie Payne, Paul Findlay, Patrick Ruddy and Sandra Verkuyten and I would like to thank them all for their contribution. We have welcomed Dr Danny Taggart and John Blake to the Board and we look forward to working with them. Thanks to all our Trustees who continue to support the CEO and her team, sharing their knowledge, skills and expertise and promoting the vital work that Healthwatch Essex does. Thanks too to all our volunteers who share their experiences and speak up for some of the more vulnerable people in our communities, acting as their Ambassadors to ensure that they are heard.

The way ahead is not without its challenges, in particular finding ways to address the crisis in health and social care and ensure that sufficient funding is allocated to these services. We will continue to work closely with our colleagues in the Integrated Care Partnerships and support them to find innovative new ways of working together to provide more and improved care and support for our local communities.

Amanda Cherry, Chair of the Board of Trustees



About Us

Who we are and what we do

We are an independent voice for the people of Essex, helping to shape and improve health and social care services in the county. We believe that people's views and lived experience of health and care matter, so we're here to make sure your voice is heard and responded to. We also provide an Information and Guidance service to help you access, understand and navigate the health and care system.

Our Vision

That people's voices and experiences influence all health, wellbeing and care.

Our Mission

Seeking and listening to people's experiences and voices to create opportunities to shape all health and wellbeing services and policy for Essex.

What we do

Through innovative research and engagement activities – our reports, events, films and outreach events – we make evidence-based recommendations to the NHS and social care authorities and demonstrate how lived experience can have a positive impact on the redesign and improvement of local services. We have powers in law, as set out in the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and updated in 2022, to encourage people to share their views and lived experience with us.

We also provide an information service to help people navigate the health and social care system via a confidential phone call, text or email.

Who we work with

We work closely with the health and social care authorities in Essex to help make sure they put patients and the public first. This includes the three Integrated Care Systems, one mental health trust, five acute hospitals, as well as Essex County Council which has responsibility for social care and public health.

We also work with regulators and other commissioners and providers of health, primary care and community care alongside various voluntary organisations to ensure the voices of Essex residents are heard and taken into consideration when improving local services.

As part of the wider Healthwatch network, we share information with Healthwatch England, which provides a formal link to the Department of Health and Social Care and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. Our performance and impact are closely monitored by this network and Essex County Council, who are responsible for commissioning a local Healthwatch service.



Some of the team at a Healthwatch Learning Event

What is 'lived experience'?

'Lived experience' describes people's first-hand accounts of their health and care. How people experience health and care services is affected by their own personal circumstances; for example, whether they have a family or whether they are in work. Their 'lived experience' (good or bad) can shape the trust and confidence they have in health and care services.

That's why it's important the system takes the time to find out about the people who use services – to empathise and recognise the impact their service has on the individual and to use this insight to better understand the health and care needs of the local population.

Our governance

We want to make sure that as many people as possible can share their voice and stories with us and so we continue to take steps to involve the public and volunteers in our governance and decisions about our work.

Our Board of Trustees is responsible for the strategic oversight of Healthwatch Essex. They meet regularly to support and guide the organisation in its strategic ambitions.

Our Year at a Glance



April 22

Our Addiction campaign featured on ITV Anglia Evening News and on local radio.

Trauma Ambassadors shared blogs on their experiences and promoted the group.

One of our Research Ambassadors wrote about how his lived experience of schizophrenia and autism impacts qualitative research.



May 22

Our report 'Pathways to Meaningful Lives' was released exploring how people with learning disabilities experience employment.

Our report about middle aged men and suicide was released.

At the WECAN Digital Centre Launch we learnt about the latest technology to support people and reduce social isolation.



June 22

We marked Volunteers Week and Men's Health Week across our social media channels.

Our team had great fun speaking to the public at Essex Pride in Chelmsford.

We celebrated the Platinum Jubilee at an event for Blind Veterans.

We launched our 2021-22 Annual Report.

July 22

Our podcast returned with an episode about alopecia.

We attended the inaugural meeting of the Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board.

We featured on Chelmer Radio at Maldon U-Fest.

Collaborate Essex Disabilities and Carers Forum held its first hybrid meeting.

August 22

It was a sunny month for outreach events, including trips to Harlow, Clacton Airshow and Combat2Coffee.

We held our first Beach Hut Day in Brightlingsea to engage with the public.

Our Young Mental Health Ambassadors released a report about body image.

September 22

Collaborate Essex ran an Accessible Information Best Practice workshop.

Our Hidden Voices Network launched to connect different organisations and communities.

We visited Colchester Museum to learn about how disabilities were treated in the past.



Here are some of our highlights from the last 12 months...



October 22

We marked Baby Loss Awareness Week with a special podcast.

At University of Essex Fresher's Fair, we recruited to our Research Ambassador scheme.

We did outreach events with Ukrainian refugees and traveller communities.

We collated feedback in response to a mental health documentary.



November 22

Our Trauma Ambassador Group released their Trauma Card initiative.

Our CEO attended the Third Sector Summit.

We held a celebration event for our Understanding Inequalities project, which was also up for an award this month.

We started filming for our fertility project.



December 22

Collaborate Essex celebrated 3 years of the forum with a Christmas event.

Our team volunteered at a Ukrainian Christmas event.

We held our own Christmas celebrations at our office and in Colchester.

We won an Active Essex award for 'Active Workplace of the Year'.

January 23

At an event in Rayleigh we spoke to people experiencing dementia and their carers.

We attended Witham Wellness Wednesday events.

Collaborate Essex discussed improving communication and the mistreatment of patients in hospitals.

February 23

We went to Winter Cafes to provide information and guidance.

Our Young Mental Health Ambassadors celebrated Children's Mental Health Week on social media.

Some of our Trauma Ambassadors promoted the Trauma Card initiative to various groups across Essex.

March 23

'An Evening with Healthwatch Essex', our annual event, took place in Chelmsford.

On social media we counted down to our 10-year anniversary on 1st April 2023.

'Happiness, Heartbreak and Hope', a book and short film series about fertility, was released.





Listening & Engaging

**Capturing and sharing your
experiences to help improve
health and social care services**

2022–23 in Numbers

Sharing experiences

110+

ambassadors now in our team who use their lived experience to shape local services. We have ambassadors with experience of mental health, trauma, caring, disabilities and more.

Supporting people

1296

people accessed support from the Healthwatch Essex Information & Guidance team via our website, phone, text, WhatsApp, live chat or email.

Connecting online

358k

views across our social media channels, 58,193 people visited our website and 124 people provided information to us via our online Feedback Centre.

Our Projects

Read how we've captured your voice through our research and engagement, working with a wide range of people on various projects.



"I find it very helpful - because of the anxiety I just shut down and can't talk. Knowing I've got the card means I'm less likely to be triggered. It's like that comfort blanket. It takes that stress off you."

- Denise, Trauma Ambassador

Pictures top to bottom:

- 1 - Trauma Ambassador John showing the front of the Trauma Card
- 2 - John handing the card to a nurse
- 3 - Denise showing the back of the Trauma Card
- 4 - (L-R) Denise, Information and Guidance Manager Sharon, John, and nurse Michelle smiling holding Trauma Cards after creating an information film



Trauma Cards

The Healthwatch Essex Trauma Ambassador Group (TAG) ascertained that there was a clear need to improve conversations between health and care professionals and people living with trauma. In response to this need, they created 'Trauma Cards' as a tool to empower individuals who have experienced trauma to communicate more effectively with healthcare professionals.

The cards are designed to be handed to a healthcare professional when a cardholder finds themselves in a triggering situation, making those they are interacting with aware of when they are experiencing the effects of trauma, and to inform them about trauma and how to more effectively support, and work with, those living with the effects of trauma. This will enable the cardholder to get the support they need, to be empowered and to achieve a better outcome for all concerned.

When trauma survivors have a negative experience in a healthcare setting, it can result in them withdrawing and disengaging from health and care services completely, which means they don't have access to the health and care that they may need and are entitled to. The card can help to facilitate conversations and enable a level of understanding which otherwise may well not happen. It is a positive step towards creating equity for those of us living with trauma.

The front of the Trauma Card explains that the cardholder is experiencing the effects of trauma in this particular setting, and the reverse gives some simple tips on how to offer support to the individual. The card also has a QR code which, when scanned, provides more information to the healthcare professional about what the individual is experiencing and how best to help them. There is also a page for cardholders to obtain more information about trauma and how to access appropriate support.

The group hope the cards will educate staff and empower individuals living with trauma. John, a Trauma Ambassador, says "I carry the Trauma Card because I really need health professionals to understand that some of these situations are really quite difficult for me and make me very anxious. Sometimes there isn't the opportunity to open the conversation up about this subject, so simply by handing over the card it starts the dialogue. I hope it will allow health professionals to feel able to ask me what I need as a survivor of trauma. They forget just how traumatic and triggering some of these procedures can be for someone who has suffered trauma."

The cards are also available to professionals who wish to provide them to their own service users, enhancing their own trauma-informed service provision. To date, approximately 10,000 cards have been requested by individuals and agencies not only within Essex, but other UK counties, including in Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Interest in the scheme has also been shown from agencies in Eastern Europe and the USA.

The University of Essex will be undertaking an independent evaluation of the impact of the Trauma Cards from May 2023, when they will have been in circulation for six months.

Community Asset Mapping

Over the last three years, we have been working with Community360 and Community Voluntary Services Tending on a Community Asset Mapping project. This mapping is a refresh of a project that was undertaken in 2019, working increasingly with 'neighbourhoods' as they become fully established. The reports, commissioned by the North East Essex Health and Wellbeing Alliance, aim to highlight the strength of the community through the numerous assets found across Colchester and Tending and compare against data and information about needs, which highlights any gaps. It also shows the resilience of assets throughout the pandemic and some of the challenges going forward because of the pandemic. The published reports are companions to the North East Essex Community Assets Map. Healthwatch Essex gathers the citizen's voice within the varying engagement areas of each domain.

The North East Essex Health and Wellbeing Alliance is committed to working within an ABCD approach ensuring work is done with, and not to, local people. Assets, as defined by the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) model, can be individuals, associations, institutions, places and spaces and connections. By understanding the assets, local commissioners are better placed to support community organisations, build partnerships, consider funding options and community and voluntary sector organisations are better placed to grow their support to local people.

Consequently, understanding the strength and resilience of these assets, as well as acknowledging those areas requiring support or help with sustainability, is fundamental to achieve the shared objective – to work together to help everyone live well locally.



During the last year, the Die Well and Stay Well reports have been published.



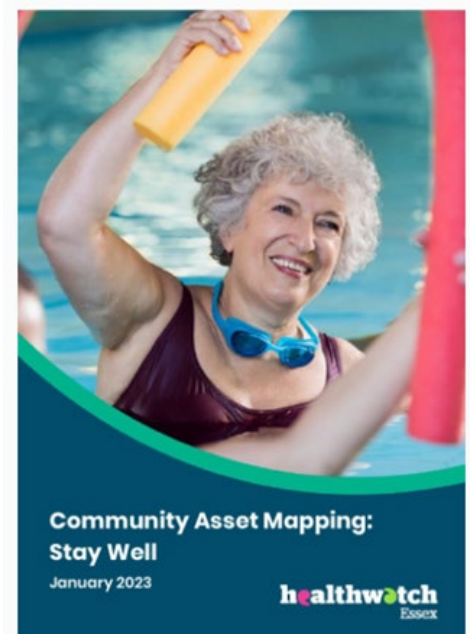
Die Well report

Die Well focussed on end-of-life care in residential and nursing homes and the support to live at home. The engagement areas for the citizen's voice work were held in Shrub End and Prettygate in Colchester and Lawford, Manningtree and Mistley Ward in the Tendring wards. These areas were of specific interest, due to demand and demographics. Work focussed on:

- National versus local assets – pathways to self-access, how they are promoted.
- Compassionate communities – making the community input count to deliver positive outcomes for people and their family/carers at end of life.
- Networks of care.
- Cultural diversity – learning from different ways of practice; overcoming language and understanding barriers.

Stay Well focussed on people living with long term conditions and their carers and additionally, hospital admission avoidance and supporting people awaiting elective surgery. The engagement areas for the citizen's voice work were held in Greenstead in Colchester and Walton in Tendring. These were areas of specific interest due to demographics (including a more diverse population in Greenstead), number of care homes and levels of deprivation. Focus also included:

- Physical health and wellbeing.
- Local cultural factors and limitations, including the impact of diversity on admission avoidance and elective surgery.



Stay Well report

We are currently working on the Age Well domain, the fifth in the series. The chosen areas for the citizen's voice are Tiptree in Colchester, Jaywick and Holland-on-Sea in Tendring due to a specific interest in demographics, mortality, and levels of deprivation. The work considers key drivers and influences on people in later life and their carers. The work is focussing on:

- Key challenges facing older people and their carers, with a focus on physical health and wellbeing – to include ageing people with a learning disability.
- Community assets supporting older people to be healthier and more active.
- Ensuring that carers know where and how to access information, advice and support relevant to them and the person they care for.
- Supporting carers to be fully involved in decisions about the health and social care needs of the person they care for.
- Services rooted in the community which support older people's mental health.



'Happiness, Heartbreak & Hope'

Experiences of Fertility and Baby Loss in Essex

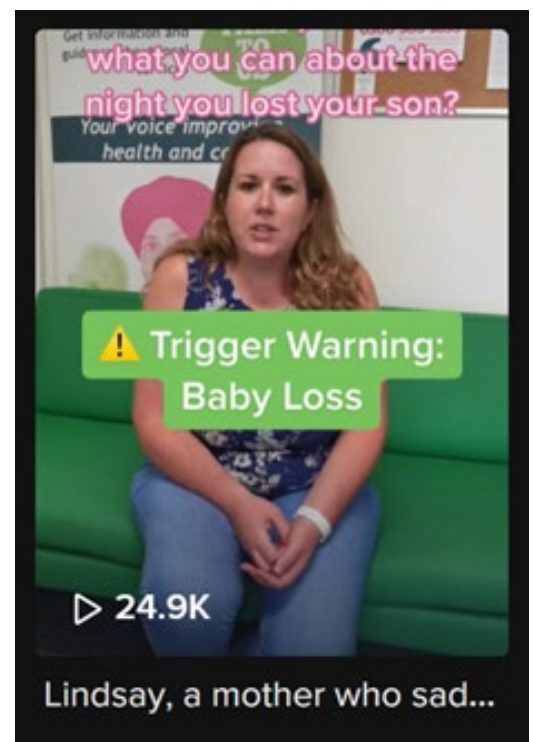
As fertility can sometimes be considered a taboo topic, Healthwatch Essex wanted to bring forward the hidden voices around this topic and allow for people's stories to be shared. We wanted to ensure this project would allow other people going through their fertility journeys to be able to relate to these stories.

We engaged with families with lived experience of many different aspects of fertility. We were keen to capture stories of those who were currently on their IVF journey, those who have had the joy of their desired outcomes, and families who were not so fortunate. We spoke to women living with conditions (including endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome) which can affect fertility and explored how these conditions mentally affected their perception of their body image. We also engaged with men to ensure that their voices and experiences were included, and with same sex couples to ensure that we were inclusive in exploring people's different journeys of parenthood. Additionally, we engaged with several partners such as fertility clinics, hospitals, medical professionals, charities, and maternity forums.

The stories were shared in a variety of ways including a podcast titled 'Henry's Legacy: A Life Well Lived.'; a number of short videos shared on our TikTok channel, which have been watched over 27,000 times, and through our social media channels. This led to a high level of engagement with an outpour of empathy and understanding. A large percentage of the comments were from people who also shared their own experiences of baby loss.

This page top to bottom:
1 - Front cover of the book
2 - Screenshot of one of Lindsay's TikToks with almost 25,000 views

Opposite page top to bottom:
1-3 - Project participants Laura-Rose, Suzy and Antonio (and his children) filming digital stories
4 - (L-R) Lindsay and Communications Officer Chloe recording a podcast



Healthwatch Essex has produced a book titled 'Happiness, Heartbreak and Hope' which will be distributed throughout several maternity units and fertility clinics in Essex. The digital version of the book is available for download from our website and is also available in print format for those who require it for accessibility purposes.

Several common themes were highlighted from our participants' stories below:

- Signposting: Lack of signposting to support networks when they were needed most. This may not necessarily be straight after the loss of a baby but could be 12 or 18 months down the line.
- Poor mental health: Bottling up of unprocessed feelings, with a potential of leading to depression and the risk of turning to drink or drugs as a coping mechanism. Some of our male participants said that crying was deemed to be a sign of weakness so they felt unable to outwardly express their true feelings.
- Lack of information: There is a lack of information and aftercare. More information on IVF would be greatly appreciated as there was a shared feeling amongst participants that they themselves had to seek the necessary information by joining groups, doing their own networking or hearing other people's stories via the online community.
- Support forums: These can be very helpful and offer an opportunity to share experiences.
- Training: The need for additional specific training for staff when dealing with these very difficult, traumatic and emotional situations.

Stories from families who have experienced baby loss during pregnancy, labour or stillbirth have been included. By sharing these, we hope this will help support those who felt very alone when going through this painful and traumatic experience. Being able to share these powerful stories will allow for professionals to understand areas of improvement which may be required.





Members of the forum enjoying a BBQ at the allotments

Essex Fella's Forum

The Essex Fella's Forum launched in October 2021 and has provided a monthly meeting place for men every first Monday of the month. The forum meets locally at The Bricklayers Arms in Colchester, where men informally discuss issues such as health, wellbeing, men's health screening, fatherhood, confidence, self-esteem and more.

The forum has since incorporated physical activity throughout the calendar year, participating in activities outdoors such as fishing, gardening, community allotments, BBQs, and 'walks and talks'. The group has plans to take part in walking football, bushcraft, golf, sailing and camping in the near future.

The Essex Fella's Forum is growing and now has 30 members, all of whom have diverse backgrounds, and some who have networks related to men's health and wellbeing. The group has worked on projects together and are hoping to engage in events and activities throughout the calendar year to support organisations who cover this topic.

Understanding Inequality

For the past two years, Healthwatch Essex has been working in collaboration with Mid and South Essex Foundation Trust (MSE) to improve their hospital services for people living with learning disabilities (LD).

As part of the Understanding Inequality project, several participants living with learning disabilities shared their experiences visiting hospital for a short film. They also attended workshops with healthcare staff, charities and community groups to co-produce a series of recommendations designed to improve access to hospital services.

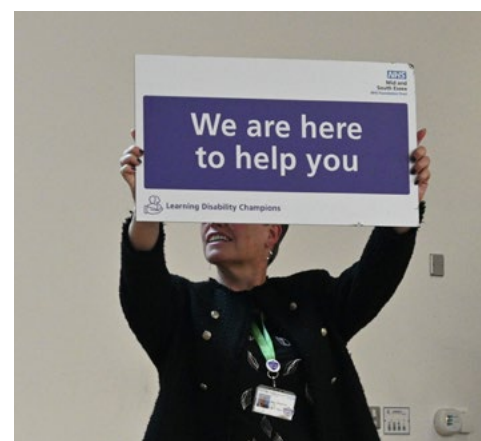
Those recommendations are now being put into practice thanks to the involvement of staff and patient champions, helping to improve the experiences of the 17,000 people with learning disabilities locally. Improvements include lanyards for learning disability patients and staff, so they can be immediately identifiable to one another, as well as making letters more visual and easier to understand. Healthwatch Essex has also been supporting MSE to produce staff training that is grounded in the lived experiences of people living with learning disabilities.

In 2022, the Understanding Inequality project was nominated for the Learning Disabilities Initiative of the Year Award at the Health Service Journal Patient Safety Awards. This national nomination has been a huge boost for all the staff and participants on the Understanding Inequality project and helps to show how we can make a real difference by working together.

In response to the nomination, Preeti Sud, Head of the Strategy Unit and lead for the Trust's Health Inequalities programme, said:

'We are thrilled to have been shortlisted for the Learning Disabilities Initiative of the Year award. This recognition helps shine a light on the collaborative efforts and dedication of our staff members and Healthwatch Essex, who have worked closely with patients with learning disabilities over the last 12 months to successfully run the Understanding Inequality project.'

Left - right: signs from the awards evening; (L-R) participant Jennifer and CEO Sam at a celebration event; sign showing an example of MSE's new purple LD branding.



Spotlight on... Our Events

Brightlingsea Beach Hut Day

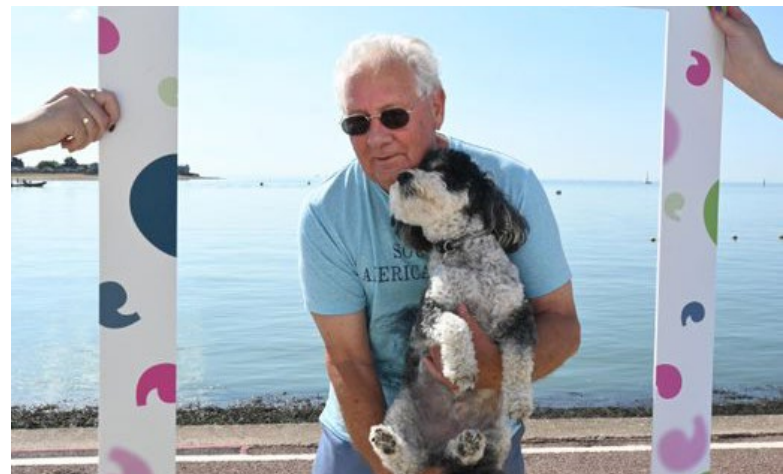
In August our team descended on Brightlingsea for the day for a fun day of public engagement. The goal of the day was to raise awareness of Healthwatch Essex's work to ensure people's voices are at the heart of health and social care, but in an exciting way that celebrated the beautiful county we live in.

We provided information about the various projects we run and about our information and guidance service. We also encouraged people to share their views about healthcare with post-it notes on our big whiteboards.

What did people say?

What has been your best experience of health and social care?
Most people commented on the nursing staff who had time to talk.

What has been your worst experience of health and social care?
Diagnosis delays and waiting times came up frequently.



Clockwise - 1 - (L-R) Engagement Manager Dan and Shawn, the Mental Health Runner; 2 - a man posing with his dog in the Healthwatch frame; 3 - Engagement Officer Mel emerging from a beach hut; 4 - Digital Marketing Apprentice Libby handing out sweets from the beach hut.



Healthwatch Essex Annual Showcase

In March 2023, we held our second annual event at Hylands House in Chelmsford showcasing our projects over the past year. It was incredible to highlight all of our achievements and also network with many partners from across the county.

We shared the findings from our project focussed on experiences of fertility, with our podcast guest Lindsay sharing her story of losing her son Henry, and showing Laura-Rose's digital story.

Todorina from the Collaborate Essex Disability and Carers Forum shared her experiences of hearing loss and how she has participated in the forum.

We were pleased to hear from two of the Trauma Ambassador Group talking about how the Trauma Card has helped them with managing their experiences of trauma when accessing health and care services.

Our Research Team shared details of their new Research Ambassador Network with a digital story about Dr Ben Gray's experiences of volunteering.

To round off the night of celebration, we thanked Jo Smith for her moving videos about her experiences of contracting COVID-19 whilst working on the COVID hospital wards. We can't wait for the next evening with Healthwatch Essex in 2024!

Clockwise - 1 - Engagement Manager Dan and Business Apprentice Grace; 2 - Trustees Neil and Amanda; 3 - (L-R) Research Associate Sarah and Research Manager Kate; 4 - (L-R) Fella's Forum member Nick and Engagement Officer Jason.



Information & Guidance

**Helping you access the
information you need about
health and care services**

Caller Statistics

How many people contacted us?

1296 people sought support and information from our Information and Signposting Team online, by text, phone call, email, letter, web chat and WhatsApp between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023.

How did people find out about us?

- 18%** Previously used our service
- 14%** Our website
- 13%** Internet search
- 9%** Friends/word of mouth
- 9%** GP surgery

What are people calling about?

Frequent lines of enquiry include



Registering and accessing GP services



Mental health support



Hospital care issues

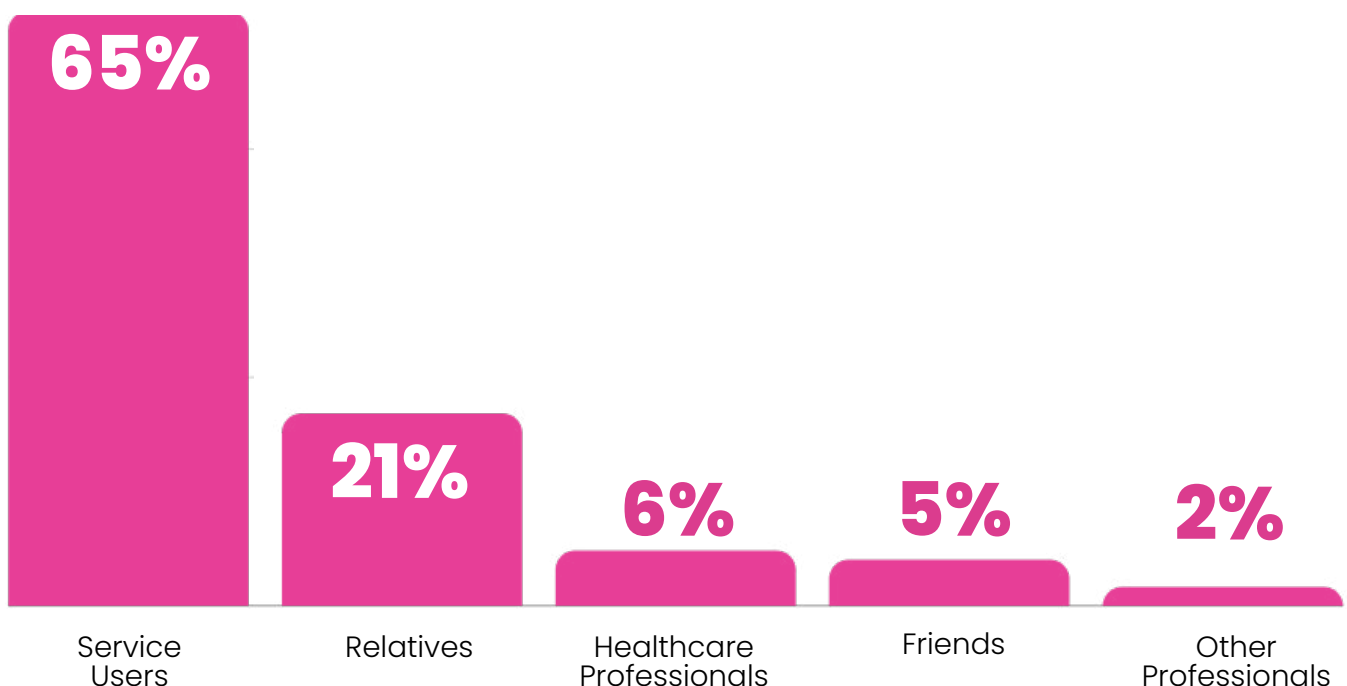


Issues with housing and homelessness



Difficulty accessing NHS dental care

Who is contacting us?



Informing Essex

The past year has been a busy one for the Information and Guidance Team, with a steady flow of enquiries, an increase in the number of reports we have produced, and a return to a more robust outreach programme out in the community.

We have regularly participated in a wide variety of meetings across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors in every part of the county, to ensure that the lived experience of the people of Essex is represented effectively. These have included regular representation at the Essex County Council People & Families Scrutiny Committee and Health, Overview & Policy Scrutiny Committee, the LeDeR learning disabilities mortality review panel, and various meetings implemented by the Essex Alliances, Integrated Care Boards and Integrated Care Systems (ICS) within our footprint.

We have continued to work collaboratively with Healthwatch Suffolk in engaging with the people on behalf of Suffolk & North East Essex ICS, producing various insightful reports (see <https://healthwatchessex.org.uk/library/>). Similarly we have begun an ongoing collaboration with Healthwatch Hertfordshire, engaging with people on behalf of Hertfordshire & West Essex ICS.

We have continued to produce the quarterly Spotlight On Services data, featuring the nature of the calls we receive across the county, both on our website and via direct communication to partners.

We have produced blogs covering topics including period poverty and availability of period products, homelessness and trauma-related subjects in conjunction with the Trauma Ambassador Group.

We delivered a session on the role of Healthwatch and the importance of the service user voice to the District Nursing Students at Anglia Ruskin University and participated in the Community Initiative Fund allocations panel.

We were commissioned by the Mid & South Essex Hospices Collaboration to undertake a project to help shape the future of palliative care services for local people of all ages in the area. The purpose of our engagement was to gather lived experience and information about what matters to those who are dying, as well as to their loved ones and carers, what is currently working well in the services provided, and what could be done better, with a view to working to improve this for the current and future generations.

With the wide range of subject matters that we are contacted to support with, the team have undertaken training to keep their skills and knowledge dynamic and effective. Training received in the past year has included fuel poverty, carbon monoxide awareness, sexually transmitted infections, chemsex, dementia, first aid, HIV, benefits, LGBTQI+ and working with trauma.

We can't wait to see where the year ahead takes us!



Clockwise: 1 - the Research Team on the information stall at University of Essex Fresher's fair; 2 - the Healthwatch Team at Essex Pride; 3 - Information and Guidance Officers Sara and Fergus with ambassador Roger (centre) at an event in Harlow; 4 - Communications Officer Chloe at a Blind Veterans Jubilee party recreating the 'Rosie the Riveter' poster.

Outreach

We attended over fifty outreach events, where members of the team went along to engage and inform people about our services. These included the Blind Veterans UK Queens Platinum Jubilee Garden Party, Essex Pride, county traveller site health and wellbeing visits, Maldon U-Fest, visits with the north east Essex SOS Bus to support homeless people and street drinkers, Deafblind support groups, Alzheimer's Society Winter Cafes, the University of Essex Fresher's Fair and of course our whole team Beach Hut Day in Brightlingsea.

Reporting From...

North East Essex

We were asked by Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System (SNEE ICS) to explore a variety of topics related to health and wellbeing.

Transition from Child to Adult Services

We were asked by SNEE ICS to explore people's experiences of the transition from child to adult health, care and wellbeing services. From our engagement, we found some instances of good practice, but also instances where young people and their families clearly felt let down and excluded from the process, even to the point where it was felt that there had been a significantly detrimental effect on the young person and their wellbeing. Participants told us of issues around inclusivity, involvement and communication. At a time in a young person's life when many changes are occurring, the transition between child and adult health and care services has the potential to add more frustration, instability and worry to both the individual and their families and carers.

Elective Care

We were asked by SNEE ICS to gather information and lived experiences of elective care. The Covid-19 pandemic saw the delay and cancellation of many elective care operations due to the redeployment of staff and equipment, and the additional burden placed on already stretched parts of the service in North East Essex, increasing both the numbers of people on waiting lists, and the average waiting time. It was evident from our engagement with participants that everyone hoped for a person-centred, holistic approach from services during their wait for elective procedures, and that an integrated system across the North East Essex footprint would be essential in ensuring this. Partnership working between health, social care, and the community and voluntary sectors was shown to be key, along with the assurance that the views and needs of the patient, and in turn their carers and loved ones, are sought, heard, and respected at every stage. Services working together will be fundamental to improving outcomes for all patients.

What Matters to the People of North East Essex?

SNEE ICS asked us to pose the over-arching question of 'What matters to you?', followed by 'Why does it matter to you?' and 'How should leaders be thinking and doing things differently in our health and care services?' The findings from this would be used by them to shape and inform their health, care and wellbeing strategy moving forward. Our engagement illustrated that, whilst there are many different health, care and wellbeing matters concerning the people of North East Essex, their priorities lie firmly in the provision of GP services, dentistry and mental health services. When in crisis, people need to be able to address the issue promptly and receive an acceptable level of response. Currently, a significant number do not feel that this is the case and would like to see better communication, better availability of NHS services and a more person-centred approach.

All of our reports can be accessed through <https://healthwatchessex.org.uk/library/>.

'The feeling that I am invisible as a woman over forty.'

Participant quote from the Menopause report

Experiences of the Menopause and Perimenopause

We were asked to undertake this important piece of work within the realm of women's health by SNEE ICS. Perimenopause and menopause are issues which will affect the majority of women at some point during their lives, but there is little in the way of information and awareness provided across society to help prepare them. The many women who participated in the project spoke candidly of their experiences, showing that each case was unique and individual. We were able to gain insight into the symptoms and effects of perimenopause and menopause, as well as exploring the avenues for support and treatment available, and how well they worked. Our findings highlighted that there are clear gaps in knowledge and a wide differential across primary care, which is the first port of call for most women. Whilst improvements have been made, there is still some way to go in bringing knowledge and awareness of this subject into education, employment and general society, thus eradicating the taboo which still exists and creating a more holistic, understood experience for women.

Do I Want to See a GP?

We were approached by SNEE ICS to undertake a project on people's experiences of GP services. We focussed on the initial question 'Do I want to see a GP?' and garnered a significant volume of responses. Whilst a significant number of individuals were generally satisfied with the service provided by their GP surgery, many took the opportunity to express their concerns and dissatisfaction. The issues raised mainly centred around the availability of appointments, booking systems, quality of care and quality of staff. The impact of the digitisation of services was also raised along with the issues that will be faced by a significant number of those with sensory impairment, learning disabilities, mental health issues and other conditions, who may face additional barriers to accessing these services.

Information and Guidance Officer Fergus at the Brightlingsea Beach Day promoting the information service



West Essex

We were asked by Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (H&WE ICB) to explore a variety of topics related to health and wellbeing.

Carers

In 2021, Carers UK estimated there were over 13 million people caring for a disabled, older or seriously ill relative or friend across the country. In many cases, this means juggling work and other commitments whilst care giving or caring full time on a carers allowance of £69.70 (2022/23). These 'unpaid' carers are estimated to save the government a staggering £135 billion per annum. However, we know that many do not consider themselves 'carers' and are not registered as such. As our population ages and life expectancy with a long-term illness increases, more and more people are taking on caring roles, and H&WE ICB asked us to gather their important lived experiences. We were able to provide insight into what is going well, what could be improved, where there were blockages in the system, and what ongoing initiatives should be in place. The findings in the report will inform the ICB to identify areas of structural change, alongside key services to develop and commission to match and reflect the increasing numbers of unpaid carers and their core needs.

GP Access for Children and Young People

Improving the health of children and young people is one of the core principles of the H&WE ICB's constitution, and as such, they asked us to explore their access to primary care services. The health of children and young people can be an emotive topic for parents, their wider family, teachers, carers, friends, and many more. It is important that the impact that any problems or delays have physically and emotionally, not just for the patient, but for family and friendship groups as well, are assessed and addressed. We discovered issues around accessibility, appointments and resources which were causing potential barriers to achieving positive outcomes. By listening to the lived experience of young people, it is hoped that the findings in the report will help the ICB to identify areas of improvement to support their community and meet its future needs.

Accessing GP Services in Harlow and Uttlesford

We were commissioned by H&WE ICS to undertake a project exploring people's lived experience of accessing GP services in Harlow and Uttlesford. We set out to explore what was working well, what was not working well and what the assets and barriers were to accessing services in the two districts. Our engagement garnered a significant amount of feedback, and whilst some individuals were generally satisfied with the service provided by their GP surgery, many took the opportunity to express their concerns and dissatisfaction around several issues. Our findings included significant feedback around accessing GP services, lack of choice and the digitalisation of services which was presented to the Integrated Care System to inform their work moving forward.

Experiences of Community Pharmacies

We were commissioned by H&WE ICS to undertake a project focussed upon people's lived experience of accessing community pharmacies in West Essex, exploring issues including access to community pharmacies, what they were being used for, what was and was not working well, and quality of service provision. Our findings included issues around communication, physical access, and medication. There was a large response from one small town in the area (Stansted Mountfitchet) where the residents are very frustrated with their current pharmacy provision and engaged with our project to make sure their voice was heard.

Mid and South Essex

The Future of Palliative Care Needs in Mid and South Essex

The Hospice Collaboration Group in conjunction with the Clinical Commissioning Groups commissioned us to undertake a Needs Analysis within the Mid and South Essex Health Care Partnership to understand the palliative and end of life care needs for the community. The aim of this project was to help shape the future of palliative care services for local people of all ages in Mid and South Essex. Death is the one certainty in life which none of us can avoid, and it is therefore imperative that the process of dying is given appropriate consideration, input and commitment to facilitating the best possible experience for the benefit of everyone in our community. Over 300 people completed our survey and many of them also took the time to share their very personal and emotional stories. This enabled us to produce a comprehensive and impactful report informing the hospices on what was working and what needed improving regarding end-of-life care in Mid and South Essex.

Quote from the Palliative Care report

'It's the biggest adventure we will have. Wouldn't it be nice to get it right?'

Hidden Homeless

We have launched a new project titled Hidden Homeless, which aims to engage with different cohorts of people who are not in secure accommodation, but are not visibly street homeless, to explore how they access health, care and wellbeing services, and the additional challenges which they may face in doing this.

The project will consist of a series of reports, the first of which will focus upon prison leavers and ex-offenders. Engagement is well underway for this project, with the finalised report due later in 2023. We aim to highlight what is working well, and where there are gaps in provision, for people in this cohort group, as well as the wide-ranging implications of not being securely housed, with a view to informing the overall system as to how improvements can be made.



The SOS bus in Clacton, a service that assists people at risk of homelessness

'I'm so relieved, not only did you listen but you helped me get the outcome I needed. Thank you again for all your help – I couldn't have done it without you.'

'Thanks so much for helping me, it just shows that if someone spends a little time helping, rather than department after department saying 'can't do that, sorry', then you can get to the bottom of it!'

'I didn't know we had such a helpful organisation with so much information in Essex!'

Information Service

Feedback



'I have been so lucky to volunteer with Healthwatch Essex. A brilliant charity making a big impact.'

'I feel that I am part of the Ambassador Team and it is like having a community supporting each other. Everyone on the team is very friendly and kind. I can't wait for what the new year brings for me and to get fully involved.'

Ambassadors

'I love volunteering! Someone asked me tonight why I do what I do and I said I find it easy to tell my story to people I do not know!'

'Even though this was a very short video, it certainly made me think and this is something I've never even thought about before.'

'Thank you for being a voice for all the unheard children/adults.'

Online Comments

'This is really good information about co-production.'

What are people saying about Healthwatch Essex?



'I would like to say thank you to the fabulous women at Healthwatch Essex who supported telling my story. Please keep doing what you're doing.'

Events and Workshops

'It was great to hear people's lived experiences with sensory impairments whilst doing some interactive sessions.'

'Such a fantastic and valuable experience. Lots of connecting with amazing health and social care professionals.'



In the Media & Online

How we communicate what we do

Our Reach

The impact of our posts over the past 12 months



Twitter

We tweeted 450 times and received 3,500 engagements with our content. This resulted in 115 new followers and our tweets being seen 91,000 times overall.



Facebook

We posted on Facebook 399 times throughout the year which resulted in 1,800 reactions to our content. Our posts were seen 124,000 times in total.



TikTok

We now have 2,800 followers on TikTok and our content received 2,600 likes throughout the year. Our videos were viewed a total of 66,000 times.



Instagram

Our Instagram channel has continued to grow, with 1,200 people now following us. Our posts reached 22,000 users and our profile was visited 33,000 times.



LinkedIn

This year we gained 263 new followers on LinkedIn and people engaged with our page 2,200 times. Our posts were seen 44,000 times and received 1,600 reactions.



E-newsletter

Each month we distribute a newsletter informing our subscribers of project updates, research and more. In the past 12 months our subscribers have increased by 17%.



Media Coverage

We had 37 articles featured in the media this year, which reached a combined total audience of over half a million. Topics included the release of our book sharing stories of fertility, the launch of our Trauma Card and multiple opportunities to share your experiences, including those related to learning disability, mental health and experience of using pharmacies in Essex.

We have worked to become as inclusive as possible, sharing our work in lots of different ways and attempting to reach new audiences regularly. This has included sharing lived experience, data and information from our reports and supporting national awareness days on topics of particular relevance to our work plan.

Our Top Stories

Here's a closer look at some of Healthwatch Essex's campaigns from the last year. We are focused on reaching different and diverse audiences online, via social media, print and more. We work system-wide and co-produce content with our volunteers and partners to help their stories come to life.

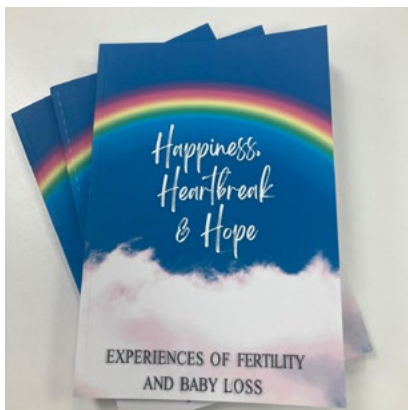


Trauma Campaign

In November 2022, we launched Healthwatch Essex Trauma Cards, an initiative designed by trauma survivors to support others living with trauma to communicate more easily with healthcare professionals. We developed a website with different sections for professionals and cardholders to provide advice and information. This content was linked to the Trauma Card via QR code and the initiative was launched alongside a video demonstrating how to use the card at Beacon House in Colchester.

Digital Stories

This year we have been creatively sharing people's experiences through digital stories after some of our team took part in a Digital Storytelling for Health master's module. Digital stories use audio recordings combined with images and/or videos. This year we have created digital stories for fertility, our annual event, and awareness weeks. This method gives people the choice to be anonymous and have more input in telling their own stories.



Fertility Book

This year, we published our very first book! 'Happiness, Heartbreak & Hope: Experiences of Fertility in Essex' collates 13 people's experiences of fertility and baby loss, investigating themes of stigma, mental health, self-perception and support and advice. The book was launched in March 2023 and was designed to raise awareness of different fertility experiences ranging from IVF to surrogacy – giving a voice to topics and issues which are not always so visible.

Spreading Festive Cheer

In December, we launched a social media campaign to spread festive cheer. Each week leading up to Christmas, we shared something festive happening within the community. Some of these included the team volunteering to serve a three-course meal to Ukrainian refugees and the team getting involved in Christmas Jumper Day.

Top to bottom - 1 - Information and Guidance Manager Sharon out filming for the trauma video; 2 - Chloe and Libby recording a digital story; 3 - copies of the fertility book; 4 - one of the social media posts for the Spreading Festive Cheer campaign.



healthwatch Essex

HIDDEN VOICES

EPISODE SIX
'Getting Wiggy With It: Living with Alopecia'

LISTEN NOW

healthwatch Essex

HIDDEN VOICES

EPISODE SEVEN
'One Team, One Dream' Essex Fella's Forum

LISTEN NOW

healthwatch Essex

HIDDEN VOICES

EPISODE EIGHT
Joanne's Story: Gender Transition in the 1990s

LISTEN NOW

healthwatch Essex

HIDDEN VOICES

EPISODE NINE
'Henry's Legacy: A Life Well Lived'

LISTEN NOW

healthwatch Essex

HIDDEN VOICES

EPISODE TEN
'Never a Life on Pause: Experiencing Menopause'

LISTEN NOW

healthwatch Essex

HIDDEN VOICES

EPISODE ELEVEN
Schizophrenia, Autism & the Power of Lived Experience - Ben's Story

LISTEN NOW

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HIDDEN VOICES

S2: EPISODE ONE
'Sophie's Story: Body Image and Disability'

LISTEN NOW

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HIDDEN VOICES

S2: EPISODE TWO
'The Mental Health Runner: Shawn's Story'

LISTEN NOW

healthwatch Essex

HIDDEN VOICES

S2: EPISODE THREE
'Same destination, different journey: Reuben's Life with Prader-Willi Syndrome'

LISTEN NOW

Podcast cover art from the past year

Hidden Voices

Our podcast, Hidden Voices, has been listened to nearly a thousand times this year! We have completed series one and now launched series two. This year we have covered the following topics:

- Prader-Willi Syndrome
- Mental Health
- Body Image & Disability
- Schizophrenia & Autism
- Menopause
- Baby Loss
- Gender Transition
- Men's Wellbeing
- Alopecia



Scan the QR code to listen to all of the episodes.



Our Ambassadors

**Helping more people have their say
through co-production**

At Healthwatch Essex, we could not influence positive change without the support of our large volunteer network. We have a variety of different types of volunteers who work with Healthwatch Essex to support our efforts to ensure health and care services better meet the needs of the people of Essex. Volunteers have donated many hours of their time this year and have been involved in numerous projects.

Collaborate Essex

The Collaborate Essex Disability and Carers Forum was established in 2019 in collaboration with Essex County Council and was created to ensure that the voices of those living with experience of disability or who are in a carer role are heard.

The forum has 13 members, all of whom have experience of either being a carer or living with a disability including autism, sensory impairments, long term health conditions, learning disabilities and physical impairments. Each forum member has a wide network which they engage with to bring back views, concerns and solutions to each topic discussed. The forums are also attended by Essex County Council senior commissioners and professionals relevant to each topic to ensure that actions are taken, and change can be made from the forum's feedback.

Throughout the past year, the forum has discussed topics including employment, GP accessibility, accessible information and the Essex County Council Disability Strategy. The forum members have also been involved in a variety of projects to ensure their voices have been heard:

- Recording training videos for GPs where they spoke about their lived experience and gave advice on how to make GP appointments more accessible.
- Facilitating an Accessible Information Workshop at the JobServe Community Stadium to provide professionals with an understanding on how to make information more accessible for people living with a disability. The workshop included interactive activities which the forum members facilitated themselves to provide attendees with more of a perspective of what it is like to live with a disability.
- Attending a focus group with Arcadis to discuss the detailed designs of a new railway station being built in Essex and how to ensure that the station will be inclusive and accessible.
- Forming an Accessible Information Standards Working Group that meets bi-monthly and is attended by people with lived experience and professionals all united in the aim of making positive change within accessible information.
- Supporting North of England Commissioning Support Unit with the writing of Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust's new five-year plan by sharing their lived experience and highlighting potential areas for improvement.



Collaborate Essex Forum Members speaking at the Accessible Information Workshop. Left - Sam, Donna and Engagement Manager Dan; Right - Todorina

Young Mental Health Ambassadors

Healthwatch Essex has been working collaboratively with Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), formerly EWMHS, since 2018 to ensure that services are designed and delivered with the voices of the young service users included within this process. To enable young people to actively be involved, the Young Mental Health Ambassador (YMHA) programme was created with Healthwatch Essex - training, recruiting and supporting the young people to feel confident in sharing their views.

We currently have 16 ambassadors, aged between 11 and 23, all with a personal experience of accessing mental health services. Their passion for supporting other young people and their openness about their own lived experience has enabled them to participate in a variety of opportunities including:

- Co-designing a survey for young people and also for parents/guardians on body image and distributing with their peers to gather views.
- Evaluating potential bidders to provide for the Transitions Service between children's and adults' mental health services.
- Attending focus groups and workshops facilitated by Traverse to help support them to deliver a programme of work for Mid and South Essex Integrated Care System to catalyse co-production with children and young people.
- Providing feedback for the new Multischools Council Self-esteem programme.
- Attending a focus group to provide feedback on the new Hertfordshire and West Essex Healthier Together website focussing on information provided about mental health.
- Participating in the Healthwatch Essex social media takeover for Children's Mental Health Week.
- Recording a podcast for the Hidden Voices series on 'Mental Health, Body Image & Disability.'



(L-R) Digital Marketing Apprentice Libby and YMHA Sophie whilst recording a podcast episode

Trauma Ambassador Group

The Trauma Ambassador Group (TAG) came together to utilise their skills and lived experiences of trauma to help inform, shape and develop health, care and wellbeing services. Members have all experienced trauma, which can arise from a wide variety of causes, including domestic abuse, sexual abuse, exposure to crime and bereavement.

Trauma can be defined as an event, or series of events, which are very stressful, frightening, distressing and/or disturbing. Trauma can be triggered at any stage in a person's life and occurs when an external factor causes them to recall the event which was traumatic to them. The effects have a huge impact on the individual personally, not just in the moment when the trigger occurs but for some time after.

Trauma is by nature unpredictable and affects so many areas of life for those who live with it. It can manifest in the most unexpected of situations in the health, care and wellbeing arena, resulting in the individual withdrawing from services, and leaving them in a position where they may not receive the care and support that they are entitled to.

The TAG aims to address these inequalities by;

- Educating and enhancing the knowledge and understanding of trauma in those who commission, provide and deliver our health services with the aim of improving them.
- Raising awareness of trauma to create better understanding within the public and professionals.
- Encouraging those in similar situations to access support and empower them to improve their experiences.



Trauma Ambassadors Kari (left) and Denise (right) speaking at the Healthwatch Essex Annual Showcase

Research Ambassador Network

Here at Healthwatch Essex, we are always keen to share our research skills and learn from others. Therefore, in January, we founded the Healthwatch Essex Research Ambassador Network – a scheme that invites individuals with an interest in health and social care, qualitative methods and lived experience to volunteer with us to gain experience conducting research in a charity. Members have the chance to develop their research skills, build connections, and share their experiences and expertise in a supportive environment. The Network is open to anyone, regardless of educational and professional backgrounds.

We host bi-monthly meetings for all our Research Ambassadors to meet and discuss different research topics, produce a regular newsletter, and invite them to support our research projects. This includes getting involved in project planning, analysing interview transcripts and reviewing academic articles. Our members are also supported to write blog posts for the Healthwatch Essex website.

Over the last year, Dr Ben Gray, one of our longstanding Research Ambassadors, has written articles for the Schizophrenia Bulletin and British Journal of Learning Disabilities. Being a Research Ambassador has encouraged Ben to align his research with his own lived experiences of autism and schizophrenia:

‘People said I would never work again because of my learning disabilities and mental health problems. But I was able to analyse transcripts and write up findings from a lived experience perspective. This enabled me to believe in myself more and recognise the value that I can bring to others, especially people with shared experiences of learning disabilities and mental health problems’.

It has been a real privilege to work with Ben over the last year. We’re excited to continue to support him and our new Research Ambassadors to explore the role that research can play in improving health and social care.



Communications Manager Rachel recording a podcast and digital story with Research Ambassador Ben



LD ambassadors and hospital staff at a hospital visit

Learning Disability Ambassadors

Healthwatch Essex supports Ambassadors with a learning disability (LD) to ensure their voices are heard and that they are treated with the same dignity and respect, living a healthy, safe and fulfilling life.

Together, we support hospitals in Essex to become more accessible for everyone, particularly those living with a learning disability. We have been working with our LD Ambassadors to gather their feedback on the accessibility of hospitals. Several topics have been covered this year including wayfinding (signage in the hospital, communication, and their experience of accessing a hospital), hospital passports, easy read communications (documents accessible for those with a learning disability which are normally a combination of pictures and some writing) and Accessible Information Standards.

We communicate in a variety of ways including in person, email, post, online forums and via WhatsApp, accommodating what best suits the needs of our LD Ambassadors. Healthwatch Essex is very grateful that our LD Ambassadors have chosen our charity to support and we're appreciative of the time they give to be part of our team!

Hidden Voices Network

In July, Healthwatch Essex launched a new Hidden Voices Network consisting of groups and individuals from across Essex, including ethnically diverse communities, LGBTQ+ groups, faith groups and refugees. The network is aimed at connecting communities up with organisations to ensure that all voices are being heard within health and social care.

So far, the Hidden Voice Network has supported gathering a case study to highlight difficulties for asylum seekers accessing local healthcare, connected communities with local diverse community patient panels and supported the Suffolk and North East Essex People and Communities Sub-Committee with the development of a new FAQ document for refugees.

In February, the first Hidden Voice Network Newsletter was distributed, sharing funding opportunities, community involvement opportunities and local events occurring within Essex. The newsletter is bi-monthly and allows for both groups and organisations to showcase the work that they are doing to support their local community.



Our Organisation & the Future

**How we support our staff and
our plans for the future**

Development & Wellbeing

One of the things that makes working at Healthwatch Essex special is our commitment to wellbeing. We are proud of our extensive wellbeing and development offer for our staff.



Trustee Neil accepting the award from Dr Zoe Williams

Active Essex Award

In December we won the Active Essex 'Active Workplace of the Year' award, accepted by our trustee, Neil Jones. Since the pandemic the Senior Management Team has worked on a wellbeing policy to support staff with flexible working, enhanced communication and a focus on work-life balance. We have set aside a fund each year to support individual wellbeing with £200 per staff member allocated to be spent on something that improves wellbeing. Ways staff have used this so far include one off purchases of an exercise app and device to track activity, a monthly private physio appointment, subscriptions to Mindspace and a monthly gym membership. A recreation club offering sport and gym facilities is also available a short walk from the office. Staff have been encouraged to fit physical activity into their day, even if that means breaking from work for an hour to go for a run. Our monthly development days also encourage getting outside and taking part in sports.

Career Development

At Healthwatch Essex we currently have three apprentices starting their careers with us, learning on the job and completing qualifications. Our newest apprentice Grace won a competition during National Apprentice Week with her apprenticeship provider for her insights into her experience.

Amanda Cherry, our Chair said 'We are very fortunate to include three Apprentices in the team (one doing Business Administration and two doing Digital Marketing). They have contributed hugely and are enjoying the wide range of opportunities they have at Healthwatch Essex.'

NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP WEEK

GRACE

"I'm currently doing a Level 3 Qualification in Business Administration within Healthwatch Essex. There's not a word in which I can describe my work within Healthwatch Essex other than amazing! The team are kind, supportive and push me to do the best of my ability. Not only does my apprenticeship allow me to learn and work towards my career, but it also allows me to meet new people and gain amazing friends. Each team welcomed me with open arms and I'm proud to say I work with Healthwatch Essex and am excited for what the future hold for me within the company."

RM Training (UK) Limited
The Stepping Stones to Your Success

Ofsted
Lead Partner

Grace's competition entry for National Apprenticeship Week

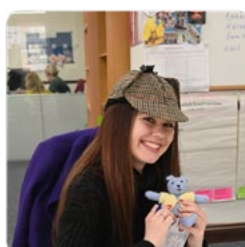
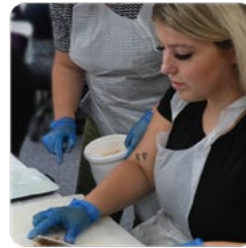
Development Days

Each month our whole team gets together to share learning and take part in team building activities. Some months a different team take the lead and share their skills – for instance, the Research Team has taught us creative research methods such as photo voice and collaging. Other months we visit a partner organisation and participate in their activities, such as making bee bombs at Abberton Rural Training or fishing at ICARP. Our development days are now an intrinsic part of what makes working at Healthwatch Essex special, fostering excellent teamwork between staff, trustees and the wider community.

Development Days 2022-23 included:

- Visiting Abberton Rural Training
- Creative research methods
- A visit from Essex Therapy Dogs
- Visiting iCARP in Great Oakley
- Learning about period products
- A chocolate making workshop
- A team-designed escape room
- An engagement skills workshop
- Detective research skills
- Axe throwing

A selection of photos from the various Development Days



Finance

To help us carry out our work, we receive our funding from the Department of Health and Social Care via Essex County Council. Here's how we've spent our money.



Information and Guidance

£131.5k



Outreach and Engagement

£149k



Commissioning and Research

£87.5k



Communications

£141k



Governance

£6.4k

Our total expenditure from April 2022 - March 2023 was £649,144.

All income received but not spent has been carried forward.

Each of the figures above includes an appropriate share of company overheads and office running costs.

In The Pipeline

2023-24

Looking ahead to 2023-24, we have a lot of exciting projects in the pipeline. Upcoming research topics include transgender experiences of healthcare (Transitions) and Inflammatory Bowel Disease in pregnancy.

Our Engagement team will explore experiences of growing older in Essex and hospital discharge, as well as an exciting engagement opportunity with schoolchildren learning about disabilities in an innovative way.

A new ambassador group for adults with experience of mental health is being developed and we will continue to grow our existing ambassador schemes.

We have an outreach programme planned to attend numerous Pride events across the county this summer to engage with our LGBTQ+ community and promote our Transitions project.

1st April 2023 marks the 10-year anniversary of the Healthwatch network, and we look forward to celebrating this milestone and reflecting on what has been achieved over the past decade.

The Healthwatch Team at a Christmas celebration





The Healthwatch Team at the annual showcase

Thank You!

This year more than ever our volunteers, participants and collaborators have been so brave and generous with sharing their voices. I am always inspired by the work we carry out and the stories we gather.

Our social media channels have continued to grow and provide a wider range of platforms for the public to engage with us. TikTok is new to me but has been a fantastic way of sharing information on some really challenging subjects in a practical and accessible way. The podcast 'Hidden Voices' has given us a window into someone else's life and I want to say a special thank you to anyone who has been involved in this.

The volunteers and ambassadors have been able to start to meet again face-to-face and have really expanded the work they have been doing with us to improve health and social care services across Essex.

I would like to thank our trustees for their dedication, governance and guidance. They give their time and energy freely to support the work we do and ensure we are well led, innovative and viable.

Finally, I would like to say a huge thank you to my staff. I have never before had the opportunity to work with such a motivated and inspirational group of people. They share a genuine passion for the people they work with and support and are always happy to go above and beyond to ensure they deliver work that we can be proud of. They support individuals to share their stories, look after them and use them to promote positive change, and they do it brilliantly!

Sam Glover, CEO



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