



Positive about disabilities

Annual Review 2024



Real
Choice
Involvement
Joining Communities
Valuing People
Support to Grow

Introduction from our Chair and Vice Chair

Reading through the ECHO newsletters since the start of 2024, it's almost impossible to pick out the highlights of the year. If we didn't know the amazing ECHO staff, volunteers and participants, it would be hard to believe how much they have managed to squeeze in to a few short months.

Of course, we aim for even the quietest day at ECHO to be rewarding, but the projects have also been creating numerous opportunities for participants to contribute to the community: About Face performing at the Hay Festival, the Big Weave at Leominster Festival, and a very special textile exhibition by Rose Tinted Rags at the Courtyard, to name but a few. There have also been outings, sports competitions, pop-up shops and a dog show; Radio ECHO interviewed the General Election candidates, and Rep Group campaigned against bank closures.

Behind the scenes, our Chief Officer Mike and his team have been working hard on fundraising, networking and generally future-proofing the organisation. We are also looking forward to some exciting new developments and opportunities for growth – watch this space!

Our heartfelt thanks and appreciation go to the ECHO staff and volunteers for their enormous energy and commitment, to our donors, supporters and sponsors for their wonderful contribution to our work, and to our participants for making it all worthwhile



Caroline Arthur

A handwritten signature of Caroline Arthur in dark ink.

Chair of Trustees



Mand Hamblin



Vice Chair

Chief Officer's View



It has been a really challenging year for ECHO financially and we have found it hard to make the money that we needed to cover our costs. It was very helpful that we had the generous legacy from Janet Smart previously, that has helped us through this tough time.

This year we have been working hard to review our services and what kind of projects we might run going forwards. This means making some tough decisions but also is a real opportunity to try new things. Change can be scary, but it is also exciting - I like to think of it as a bit like a rollercoaster, although it might be a bit scary, it is actually safely controlled. In the same way we try to manage any changes to make sure everyone knows what is happening and why.

We are still looking for the right places for our projects to work out of. We are also building up support for helping to secure the Eaton Barn site for ECHO.

Everyone has worked extremely hard this year (as always) and there have been many great moments in every project. I am also pleased that more people are hearing about the amazing work that you all do. We seem to be building up a real presence in Leominster, Herefordshire and even the wider UK. This reputation is because of the quality of what we do and the way that we focus on the needs of our participants, involving them to make decisions in all aspects of what we do.

Thank you to all of our staff, volunteers and supporters who help to make ECHO the wonderful place it is. We and I couldn't do it without you.



Mike Cook

Chief Officer

"They understand my disability and they also expect me to join in and do my best. I feel I do a good job..."

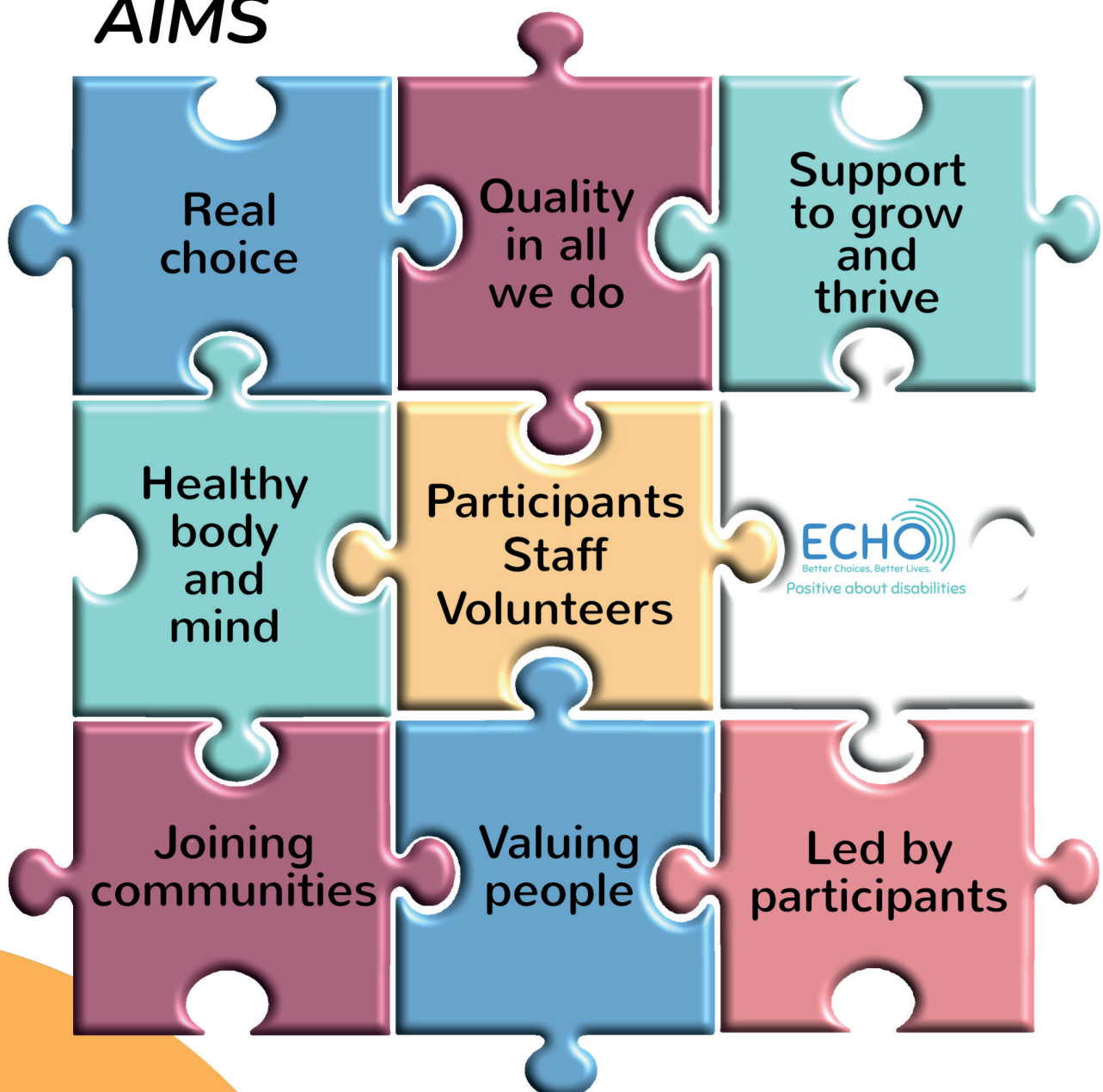
ECHO's Mission

"We want to make a positive difference to the lives of people with disabilities in Herefordshire, supporting them to know they are valued members of the community".

ECHO's Vision

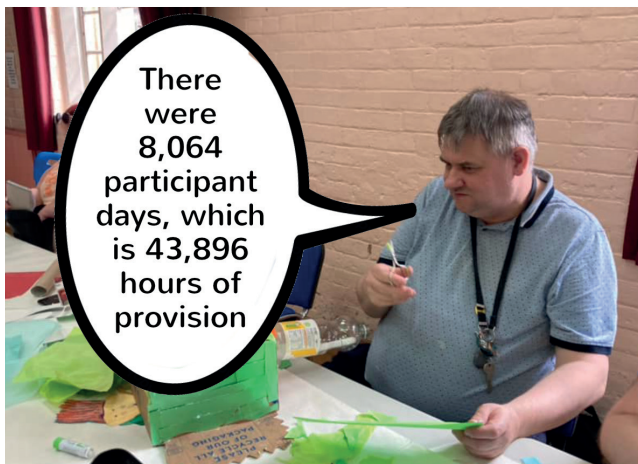
"A society where all people with disabilities are heard, valued, respected and supported to make choices and flourish".

AIMS



ECHO By Numbers

(December '23 - September '24)



There were 8,064 participant days, which is 43,896 hours of provision



ECHO worked with 153 individual participants



We had a total of 58 ECHO staff, including relief staff



ECHO published 407 posts on its Facebook page!



157 volunteers and 42 on the Steps to Employment Project



Eaton Barn sold 1,056 eggs... Cracking!



Radio ECHO made 51 live broadcasts!



Studio Mirai has saved 12.4 tonnes of unwanted furniture from landfill - the same weight as a London bus!

Real Choice

Everyone should have the opportunity to make decisions about what they do and this is very important to our participants. ECHO works really hard to make sure that everyone can input to the planning and development of what we do. In fact, it is often the amazing ideas of our participants that inspire some brilliant activities.

Storytelling has once again tackled some very varied projects. The year started with Hamlet, looking at how this classic tragedy progressed. Things then took a musical turn, with the group focussing on the Sound of Music which had been on the group's to do list for a while. This involved singing, acting, film and puppetry, all to bring the story to life in Leominster.

'We're very keen to promote how we encourage participants to think for themselves, to offer choices and chances to express opinions. We consider it of great importance to offer the appropriate level of support, being careful not to over support which can disable those we work with.' Denise

Our Hereford Projects are also really varied in what they do. Friday LifeLinks spent some time thinking how they could re-imagine the Friday project and the participants have come up with some fabulous ideas so that each Friday of the month is something completely different. This has included baking, working on their outdoor area and an Olympics theme, so they have been making equipment and taking part in different sports. The Wednesday group have enjoyed lots of walks to the lakes and have been watching the cygnets grow, shopping and have produced some fantastic crafts recently.

Cooking With Company chose to travel around the world with their cuisine, starting in North America cooking a wide range of dishes including Cajun chicken, chicken gumbo, sloppy joes, and enchiladas!



"I like coming to LifeLinks and I enjoy seeing my friends and making things".

Joining Communities

ECHO doesn't work in isolation, and we love to show people what we do by either inviting them in or going out to see them.

This year, Eaton Barn has been developing its outreach work. The project has been central in many community activities, attending plant fairs and the Leominster Festival, as well as pop up stalls in the library.

Many events were run from the community garden, and the public were welcomed in through a programme of events like an Easter Fun Day. In the summer, Eaton secured the use of the Leominster Festival marquees, which allowed the team to run several events, such as a dog show, coffee morning and quiz, as well as hiring it out to local groups.

Eaton's standing in the community has been demonstrated through all the support received regarding the opportunity to potentially purchase the site. A real range of people have expressed their backing for ECHO to buy the site and so this is something we are looking to take forwards.

About Face groups have been taking their shows out and about, demonstrating their creative talents. The Performance Company has taken the hate crime show 'Someone Else's Train' into local schools, thanks to funding from Leominster Rotary Club. Though hard-hitting, the show, performed with a workshop and has been well received. The group has also toured 'The Red Dress', 'Creation' and 'We Are All Stories'.

In May the company performed at Hay Festival, which was sold out. The Beverley Puppet Festival was another highlight, as a minibus stuffed with actors, sturgeons, mermaids and royalty made its way to Yorkshire. The actors worked hard each day and faced challenges with real positivity.

Hot on the heels of Beverley came the last Nozstock. The actors put on their wedding dresses and hit that local music festival.

A busy summer saw Drama For All deliver 'The Walrus and the Carpenter' and the Theatre Skills group work on a Punch and Judy show for Leominster Festival.



"When you come here it makes you feel happy and welcome. In the summer I like to go outside and I like doing my woodwork in the green woodwork area."



About Face:
The Red Dress

Support To Grow And Thrive

Everyone has the potential to develop and learn and over the past year the Steps to Employment Project (StEP) has facilitated 42 people with a disability to develop. All beneficiaries have joined the project to raise their confidence and self esteem, and to reduce levels of loneliness and isolation.

One beneficiary, who is neurodivergent, had struggled to find employment in his chosen profession. He became very isolated, withdrawn and completely dependent on family. The StEP team worked hard to find an inclusive work experience placement in the community. The beneficiary has now been with the firm for over six months and the team hope he will have a paid position soon. He loves the placement and works with them as much as possible, becoming a highly liked and respected member of the team.

It has been noted over the years that all volunteers come to ECHO for a specific reason. As well as giving back to the local community, volunteers may need a reason to get up in the morning, may feel lonely or isolated, or even find their 'new normal' following a traumatic event.

'Whatever the reason they come to us, volunteers always find what they are looking for and this is the magic of ECHO.' The StEP Manager

Radio ECHO has grown this year, along with the skills and confidence of its participants. The initial show, 'Radio ECHO Live!' goes from strength to strength and the crew there are becoming more self-assured in all the roles needed to bring a show to air, starting from scratch each week.

This year also saw Thank Friday It's Radio ECHO begin to broadcast. The show has a very different feel to the Tuesday group and all the new presenters have brought their ideas and personalities to the table and developed their skills and confidence. To add to the jeopardy of a live show, they don't even know which tracks will be played until decided by a series of challenges!

Radio ECHO has also supported fundraising and other events with live broadcasts and helped to present the ECHO 2023 AGM.

Listen to Radio ECHO live! 1.30pm to 3pm on Tuesdays and TFI Radio 1.30pm to 3.00pm every Friday. Find the links on the ECHO Facebook page.



Thank
Friday it's
Radio
ECHO

**"If I could,
I would do
Radio ECHO
every day of
the week!"**

Led By Participants

We don't just talk about being led by participants; we are led by participants.

A third of our Board of Trustees are people with disabilities. They bring a different perspective to the Board and are great at querying and challenging, to make sure that the decisions made are in the best interest of our members and participants.

Our Rep Group members are participants who volunteer to act as a consultative group for ECHO and other organisations. But they don't only respond to things brought to them, they also take up causes that are important to the disability community.

This year saw them write to our MP to ask him to help keep local access to banks in towns in Herefordshire and contacted the Council to ask them for an easy read version of the Blue Badge application form, as it is very confusing. They also ran some drop-in sessions for participants to help support them to vote in the general election. The group even made time to go out and about, joining the Hear Our Voice event in Hereford and running a stall in Leominster market for Disability week.

We are really pleased this year to receive some funding from the National Lottery Awards For All and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to help develop our advocacy and support work even further. This will give us capacity to support more people to take a real active role in what they do with us and beyond.



"I like helping to run ECHO. It's serious work and I know what I do is important. We make plans about what happens next at ECHO."

REPs
at work

ECHO Scrapbook

Some Highlights from the year



Some ECHO Projects at work and play! Clockwise from top left: The Priory Centre, Social & Leisure, Eaton Barn, Radio ECHO, Clever Betsy and Cooking With Company.



More ECHO snap shots. Clockwise from top left: The Rep Group out & about, About Face perform, Jason, Participant Trustee, Friday Club, Studio Mirai, ECHO office worker Jody with StEP beneficiary Gwynnfan

Quality In All We Do

Something that can really set ECHO apart from many similar charities is that we pride ourselves on the quality of the experiences we offer and the things that we create.

The quality of the work at Studio Mirai can be seen in the sales of the items it makes. This year has seen the team expand their selling opportunities and reach a wider through selling platforms including Ebay, which can sell the upcycled furniture on alongside Gumtree and Etsy. This has proved successful so far with customers travelling to buy furniture that they have viewed online.

The Studio is always updating and refreshing what it does and this year funding has allowed the team to add laser cutting and kindling machines to their equipment. The laser cutter will allow them to create and personalise new products. The kindling machine is ready for meeting the increased demand for firewood we see in the colder months, and a selection of volunteers have been familiarising themselves with this and so will be ready to oversee the use of it with some competent participants.

The Clever Betsy team created an amazing display for 'Leominster by the Sea', as part of the Leominster Festival. It included fabric seagulls, chips, rock and even ice creams! Carrying on the food theme the group also created some very realistic pin cushion cupcakes. There are always new ideas being delivered by the team and they have been making their own material and they arranged a Batik Workshop with an external tutor. This proved to be very successful, with participants being able to master the technique and produce amazing results.

In December 2023, Rose Tinted Rags had their Hidden Treasures exhibition at the Courtyard. The exhibition displayed painting, photographs and stitching by participants alongside beautiful, historic, textile pieces which had been donated to the shop. Items as old as 1860 hung alongside contemporary embroidery by our own groups.

The exhibition also included an installation of hanging christening gowns and comments such as 'Utterly beautiful', 'exquisite work' and 'By far the best exhibition seen at the Courtyard in 16 years', were recorded in our comments book.



Above:
Work at Studio
Mirai

Left:
Rose Tinted Rags
Exhibition

Valuing People

Everyone likes to be valued and ECHO tries to make sure that everyone involved in the charity feels that.

The Priory Centre participants helped to make a window display for the shop and carers/family members commented that participants had shown them the display and said how proud they were to see their work in public.

Staff also took the best personal traits of participants and put them into a personalised poem! One of the participants loves low tones spoken to her which make her laugh and smile, and it has been a wonderful way for participants to join in and interact. Another staff member has been bringing her ukulele in and everyone has been practicing sea shanties and other personalised songs. It's great to listen to everyone singing and see their enjoyment.



"I love being part of the weaving group. I like being with my friends and I like seeing people who come to watch us work in the ECHO workshop".

The Priory Centre continues to practice signing and has now made symbols for participants to ask for and choose their drinks, with some choosing different ones to those they normally would have if offered verbally only. This has also enabled participants to take drinks orders which gives them the feeling of responsibility and helpfulness.

The ECHO Weavers have had a busy year, with packages of their handwoven goods sent off to Newtown Textile Museum at the end of March in time for their Easter opening.

Kevin's twill weave upholstery fabric was united with his upcycled stool from Studio Mirai to produce a wonderful bar stool that was 'all his own work' and of which he is very proud. Kevin has now had a request for some upholstery fabric to cover a chair from someone who saw his stool at the Marches Makers Festival in Kington. Simon has completed a rug commission for friends of ECHO, that has gone to Le Fosso in Brittany. They are thrilled with it and have sent pictures of it gracing the floor of their music room.

Four ECHO Weavers and volunteers helped out on the Leominster fun day and provided excellent instruction to members of the public. The team has completed a commission for some pink mats with Michelle, Vicki and Rebecca weaving one each and bags, purses, bookmarks, key rings, cushions and rugs continue to roll off the looms.

Healthy Body And Mind

It is really important that everyone involved in ECHO stays fit and healthy and every activity does this in its own way.

Social and Leisure is a great example of this in the breadth of regular activities that they deliver. There is a range of sporting sessions throughout the year including darts, badminton, a walking group and inclusive walking football. Working in partnership with local organisations we have also been able to put on tennis and cricket activities.

Our yoga sessions continue to be popular and work on the mind as well as the body. A healthy mind is also kept active through social interaction and again there is a real range of activities that help achieve this, from Boogie Nights club night, to social events like camping, trips out to pubs, a Life Skills and Sunday Company lunch group.

Participants were supported to use public transport to go to Queenswood and Ludlow for picnics. In Ludlow, people enjoyed their time sitting round the castle chatting, looking around the shops and the market, before meeting back up at a café. Again, the aim is to support independent travel and get out into the community whilst still making activities fully accessible for all.

ECHO has also established a Healthy Mind and Healthy Body Group to look at ways we can raise awareness of the importance of looking after yourself. ECHO staff are also able to access an Employee Assistance Programme as part of working with us.



Did you know that ECHO staff sickness is about half the rate that you expect to see in the social care sector? That is a testament to our staff and that ECHO is a great place to work.

"I really enjoy learning to cook some good quality and healthy meals – something I would not be able to do without guidance and taking my time"

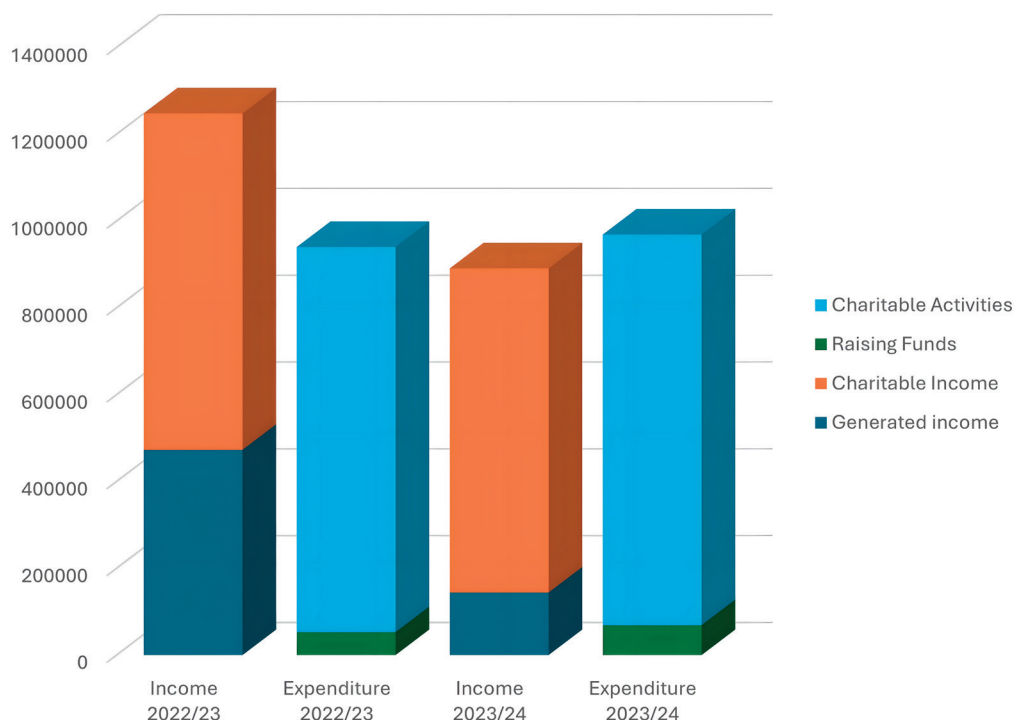
Social
& Leisure
Life Skills
Group

ECHO's Money

The financial year, from April 2023 to March 2024, was a hard one for ECHO.

Not only did we see a reduction in income, but there was also a rise in our costs. This meant that we drew upon our reserves by about £78,000. Reserves are there to help the organisation weather financial hardships and help develop the organisation.

Whilst our reserves are at a reasonable level, we need to increase income and save costs to keep it this way and allow for development in ECHO.



Supporters and Donors

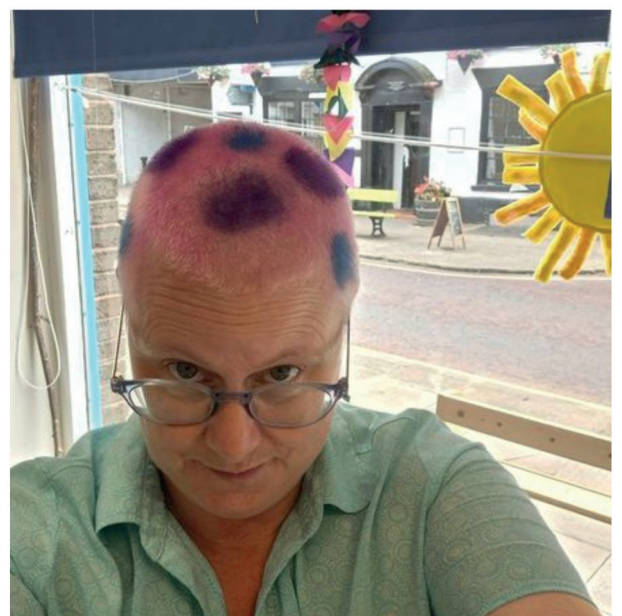
Arts Council England
Baily Thomas
Charitable Fund
Barbara Dowse
Boshier Hinton Foundation
Connexus Community
Development Fund
Co-op Local
Community Fund
Croft Trust
Derek Hill Foundation
D'Oyly Carte
Charitable Trust
E F Bulmer Trust
Elmley Foundation

Eveson Trust
Hereford Rotary
Hone Charitables
Irwin Mitchell Solicitors
Herefordshire
Community Foundation
Inchrye Trust
Le Marchant Trust
Leominster Cultural
Consortium
Leominster District
Darts League
Leominster Rotary
Manager and Staff,
Leominster Coop

Mumford Memorial Trust
Oliver Ford Foundation
Percy Bilton Charity
Rotary Helping
Herefordshire
Rowlands Trust
Royal Edward Lodge
Freemasons
Services for
Independent Living
The Edmund
Godson Charity
Welcome To Our Future
West Mercia Fund

ECHO Fundraising

Our fundraising events continue to have a significant impact on the lives of disabled people across Herefordshire. Here are some highlights from this year...



**ECHO would like to
express huge thanks to all
our fundraising events
sponsors and supporters:**

BeFibre

Brightwells

Castle Green Financial Planning

Cleftbridge

Doreen Stockton

Gail Harrison, Lloyds Bank

**Ian Monk and Richard King, Lloyds
Bank**

IPL Leominster

Jackson Properties

Kim at Bloom Space

Leominster Construction

Leominster Festival

Leominster Golf Club

Leominster Osteopaths

Michelle Hodnett

Minster Auctions

Morrisons in Leominster

Mountain Perspective

Simon Beavers BT Local Business

Specsavers Leominster

St Peter's Church Hereford

Tanners Hereford

Tescos in Hereford

Thomas Panels and Profiles

Tom Veal, Essiem

Trekitt

Previous Page:
Hawaiian Colourfest
(June '24)
Eaton Barn: Events in a Tent
(July '24)
Charity Golf Day
(August '24)
Letty's Close Shave
(August '24).

This page:
St Peter's Church Abseil
(September 2024)
The Big Bike Ride
(July '24)



Staff

Senior Team

Mike Cook
Angela Ayliffe
Nic Bullock

About Face

Jess Mackenzie
Nick Baker (left)
Jess Edwards
Kate Green
Cheryl Hewitt
Martha Palmer-Fosberry
Juliet Stroucken
Polly Taylor

Clever Betsy

Liz Evans
Lyndsay Maples
Rebecca Tabram

Eaton Barn

Cath Warren
Joyce Parr
Thomas Egerton

ECHO Weavers

Maggie Percy

Leisure and Social

Letty Flynn
Lucy Tisdale
Jane Stockton

Lifelinks

Claire Tolley
Jean Singleton
Elaine Willis

Radio ECHO

Nick Baker

Relief Team

Lucy Tisdale
Susan Clarke
Simon Formby
Anne Grace
Kim Greig
Alex Huntley
John Newman
Irene Novadnieks
Eileen Quinn
Alison Rushgrove
Mark Wakeman
Roxanne Hall
Deborah Baker
Sarah Williams

Rose Tinted Rags

Karen Meiklejohn
Tina Walton

Steps to

Employment Project

Roz Johnson
Michelle Hodnett
Sue Palliser

Storytelling

Denise Kerwood

Support Team

Nick Baker
Kay Beeden
Jody Gorle
Claire Mee
Louise Millard
Jodie Thompson
Claire Tolley
Penny Weir

Studio Mirai

Chris Jones
Dave Bordeway
Irene Novadnieks
Sue Parkinson

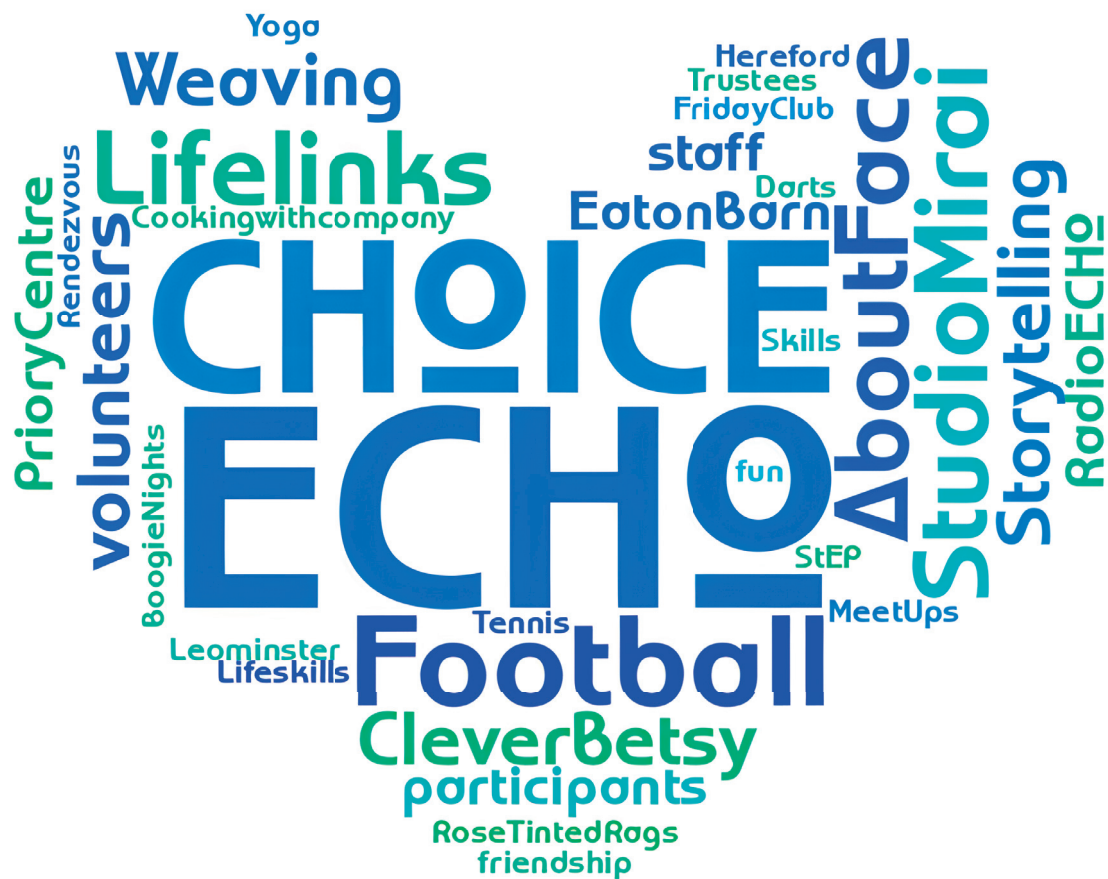
The Priory Centre

Tracy Morris
Gill Burchell
Gemma Chandler
Kate Green
Kim Greig
Mary Hughes
Eileen Quinn

Volunteers

ECHO couldn't so the quality of work it does without the kind support of our volunteers. Thank you all!

Alex Preece	Della Ellison-Smith	Kay Walton	Phil Birch
Alex Tolley	Deryn Welch	Kevin Parker (KP)	Rachel Exelby
Alison Jones	Doreen Stockton	Kevin Stuchbery	Richard Crook
Andrew Thompson	Edmund Proctor	Lama Choesang	Richard Hyde-Smith
Ann Tether	Elaine Downs	Laura Matty	Richard Pollard
Anne Bellamy	Ellie Chowns	Leroy Riches	Sara Lewis
Anne Grace	Ellie Roberts	Levi Robinson	Sarah Jenkins
Annie Taylor	Ellie Usher	Lexi rock	Simon Formby
Barbara Dowse	Emily Freer	Linda Robertshaw	Simon Harris
Bella Hesbrook	Gavin Levett	Lisa Liles	Su Pollard
Bernice Townson	Gwynnan Smith	Louis Baker	Sue Thomas
Bev Davies	Hanna Woodall	Maggie Percy	Stefan Edmead
Blaise White	Heather Hughes	Mand Hamblin	Steph Hooper
Caitlin Watters	Irene Novadnieks	Marianne Simpson	Stephen Millward
Carol Cross	James Doran	Mark Palliser	Stephen Turner
Carole Millin	James Tolley	Mark Wakeman	Stewart Mayers
Caroline Arthur	Jane Langridge	Marleen de Kluizenaar	Summer Blyth
Cheryl Howes	Janette Fullwood	Martin Rushgrove	Tanis Nash
Chloe Powell	Jason Stuchbery	Matt Jones	Tessa Frith
Chris Page	Jeanette Davies	Maureen Morton	Tim Spivey
Chris Blum	Jeanette Reid	Naomi Harris	Viv Melia
Claire Scott	Jeanette Washington	Nick Baker	Wendy Pridie
Clare Cathcart	Jenny Bartlett	Nick Burt	Will May
Coral Lemm	Jeremy Gray	Nick Clarke	Winfried Plappert
Dan Wall	Jill McLellan	Nick Tolley	Yvonne Lambert
David Cross	John Bradford	Ollie Wood	
David Hughes	John Hampson	Oliver Lavers	
David Riley	John Stuchbery	Owen Cowden	
David Robbins	Joy House	Paul Scott	
Debbie Bailey	Judith Haines	Paul Weir	
Debbie Baker	Karen Cheasley	Pete MacKenzie	
Dee Gregory			



ECHO is not just an organisation, we are a community who work together to support people with disabilities in Herefordshire to develop and grow.

We strongly believe everyone can achieve with the right support.

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Positive about disabilities