

January 2026 Newsletter

A note from: Wayne Cook - Chair Of Trustees



Looking back on a momentous and very busy year, we have marked the retirement of our much-loved Chief Executive, Ann Rowlands MBE, after 29 years with Umbrella, and the appointment of an excellent successor, Laura Bowey. Laura is only our third Chief Executive since Umbrella was founded in 1986. She brings a wealth of experience to the role and is already making a significant difference, helping us to make better use of technology to continue delivering our high-quality services and to plan for future expansion.

Demand for our services continues to grow. Despite ongoing budget pressures within our two local authorities and the NHS, we have continued to diversify our funding. This has enabled us to deliver services to over 2,000 families, carers and individuals during the year.

Thanks to the hard work, skill and dedication of our staff and volunteers, we were able to achieve the following:

Launched an Early Intervention service to empower parents and carers around the time of diagnosis, providing information, advice and in-depth support. This service reflects the very DNA of Umbrella and is delivered in partnership with the Henry Smith Foundation.

Delivered over 30,000 hours of dedicated one-to-one and group support to children and young adults.

Continued to grow our family support network across our coverage area, offering a wide range of services to support the whole family, supported by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Provided a range of youth clubs and the Raindrops Choir, enabling children to engage in activities within a safe and supportive environment.

Achieved exceptionally high levels of positive feedback from parents and carers.

As we prepare to enter our 40th anniversary year, we are focused on building upon these strengths. The Board is currently reviewing our three- to five-year strategy, considering where greater focus and additional services may be needed in the future. We will be engaging closely with key stakeholders—particularly parents and carers—to ensure we continue to provide services and support that enable children, young adults and their families and carers to thrive and reach their full potential.

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Fundraising - Special mentions



A big thanks to G's Dad!

We would like to say the biggest thank you to G's dad, who continues to go above and beyond in his support for Umbrella. G's dad has supported Umbrella through three incredible fundraising events, two of which he personally led, raising an amazing £3,832.10 in total.

These efforts included a sponsored bike ride raising £1,035, a raffle which raised an outstanding £2,277.10, and a Carsington Water walk that brought in £720. We would also like to extend a huge thank you to everyone who took part, donated, sponsored, bought raffle tickets or helped in any way. These events simply wouldn't have been possible without such generosity.

Thank you to all our supporters!

We have had some amazing donations this year. This helps to support the work we do for Families. A massive thank you for all your generosity, hardwork and kindness.

The White Swan

We would like to highlight our enormous thanks to The White Swan in Littleover, whose incredible fundraising efforts have raised more than £140,000 for our charity over the past 14 years. Every penny raised from these events goes directly to supporting disabled children, young people and their families across Derby and Derbyshire.

This year's fundraising weekend was particularly special, raising an outstanding £22,000, with the cheque presented to Umbrella in October.

Laura Bowey, CEO: "We would like to say a huge thank you to the incredible fundraising team at The White Swan for their amazing work supporting Umbrella. To have raised over £140,000 over the last 14 years is truly remarkable. We are so grateful for the difference you have made to the children and young people we support.



Charity Number 1502025

Family Support

What a year it has been for the Family Support Team!

We've enjoyed so many amazing trips, groups, and events across Derby and Derbyshire. We've been incredibly lucky to share some truly special moments with families, and we're already looking forward to creating many more memories together in 2026.



Highlight of the Year

We had a fabulous trip to Warwick Castle this year – a real adventure on a beautifully sunny day. We explored the grounds, watched the incredible shows, and some even dared to venture into the dungeons!

All the families who attended thoroughly enjoyed their time, and we're hopeful to secure funding for another big trip next year.

Staff Changes

This year, we've welcomed new staff members to the team, while also saying goodbye to a couple of valued colleagues. We're delighted to have welcomed Saima, Julie, Louise and Rachel to the team.

This month, Sarah and Karin have moved on from the team – although we may still see their familiar faces popping up at groups in the future! We wish them both all the very best.

What will 2026 bring?

- Parent & Carer Groups
- Children & Young People's Groups – safe, social spaces to build confidence
- Events & Activities – family fun days and our SEND Marketplace at a brand-new location
- Carer events and courses open to all



Early Intervention

Our Early Intervention Team have been working extremely hard and have supported many families this year, significantly reducing our waiting list so families can access support as quickly as possible.

They have also taken part in school coffee mornings and local events, helping to build strong connections within the community.

Both Julie and Louise have shared how wonderful and eager our families are to engage in the wider activities that Umbrella offers, and they are looking forward to continuing their work next year. Julie would also like to thank the attendees of the boys' group she has been working with — she loves seeing their confidence and independence grow.



Highlight of the Year

A key highlight of the year has been accessing grant funding that has supported three families with essential household items, including beds. This support has made a meaningful difference to each family, helping to improve comfort, stability, and wellbeing within their homes, and demonstrating the real impact of targeted funding.



Play & Leisure Services



Celebrating Growth and Confidence

Over the last few months, the young people at our youth clubs have been trying lots of new things and stepping out of their comfort zones, even when they have felt unsure. It has been fantastic to see their confidence grow and their willingness to get involved.

Our Saturday groups took on the challenge of playing Dungeons & Dragons, with most young people trying it for the very first time. They showed great creativity, teamwork, and enthusiasm as they learned something completely new.

Meanwhile, our Tuesday group enjoyed their Christmas meal out, where everyone ordered independently from the bar using their own money and cards. They demonstrated excellent manners, along with fantastic ordering and decision-making skills, which was wonderful to see.

Highlight of the Year

Across all groups, our youth clubs have continued to be a positive space for young people to form and maintain friendships, build independence, and, most importantly, have lots of fun. Trips out to Elvaston Castle and Laser quest have been real highlights, creating lasting memories and plenty of smiles.



Volunteering

As we reflect on 2025, we want to say a heartfelt thank you to everyone who has supported Umbrella throughout the year. From our dedicated volunteers who give their time, energy, and care, to the generosity of our corporate supporters - your support has made a real difference to the children, young people, and families we work with.



Celebrating Our Volunteers

Umbrella volunteers play a vital role in delivering our services, and we believe it's important to recognise and reward the incredible commitment they give. With the support of Room to Reward, we were delighted to say a special thank you to Sergio, our longest-serving volunteer, who has been part of the Umbrella family since 2010. His dedication over the years has made a lasting impact.

We're also proud to celebrate Eddie, the winner of this year's Volunteer STAR Award. Eddie has been volunteering with Umbrella since 2023 and regularly supports our Thursday TEAM group. He also generously gives his time across youth groups, helps with event set-ups, and can often be found tidying the garden or allotment.



Staff Changes

This month we are said goodbye to Gurvinder, our Volunteer Coordinator. Gurvinder has been part of Umbrella for five years and has been a valued support to our volunteers, always working hard to ensure projects ran smoothly and everyone felt supported.

Gurvinder will be greatly missed, and we'd like to thank her for the commitment and care she has shown during her time at Umbrella.



Children's Services

Over the past year, our Children's Services have been full of fun, laughter, and learning. It has been fantastic to see children grow in confidence, develop new skills, and build positive relationships with their peers, all while enjoying a wide range of exciting activities.



A key focus throughout the year has been life skills development, particularly through cooking and baking. Children practiced measuring, mixing, following instructions, and working safely in the kitchen, helping them build independence and confidence.

The children have made great progress in social skills and friendships, learning how to take turns, work as part of a group, and support one another. Special themed days, such as Paddington Bear Day, encouraged imagination, communication and shared enjoyment, creating memorable experiences for everyone involved.

Physical activity has been an important part of our sessions too. Children took part in activities such as bike riding, games, and movement-based play, supporting their physical health, coordination, and overall wellbeing. Trips out, including a visit to Crich Tramway Museum, gave children the chance to explore new environments, learn about the world around them, and build confidence outside of familiar settings.

Overall, the past year has been filled with achievements, new experiences, and happy moments. We are incredibly proud of everything the children have accomplished and look forward to another year of learning, growth, and fun in our Children's Services.



Adult Services

Last year was full of growth, achievement and joyful moments! From building confidence with independent living tasks such as shopping and cooking, to discovering new and accessible spaces around the city. Our young adults have continued to amaze us with their enthusiasm, kindness to one another, and willingness to try new things.



Throughout 2025, our young adults have been a huge help at Umbrella, supporting a range of meaningful tasks. Melika has regularly helped with shopping for the INDE group, showing fantastic progress in making lists, finding items, and paying at the checkout with minimal support.

Charlie has also enjoyed helping our volunteer Eddie with building maintenance and is a great helper. These contributions support the development of independent living skills and help build confidence with every task completed.

The group enjoyed a memorable visit to an alpaca farm in summer 2025. Initial nerves quickly turned into excitement, with everyone feeding the alpacas, walking them around the farm, and finishing the day with a delicious afternoon tea.

We also welcomed a special visitor, Cupcake the pony. This was particularly meaningful for Lixy, who is usually reluctant to join group activities but lit up in Cupcake's presence. These experiences play a vital role in building confidence, independence, and a sense of achievement.

Highlight of the Year

Watching our young adults step out of their comfort zones and try new experiences. This year, Harry and Thomas took a huge personal step by joining in a yoga session for the first time, after previously watching from the sidelines. Seeing them engage and enjoy it was a real milestone for their confidence. Here's to more yoga in 2026!



A note from: Laura Bowey - CEO

As we begin our anniversary year, we're not just looking back at everything we've achieved – we're looking forward to what comes next.

Over the year ahead, we're planning:

- A vibrant, inclusive celebration event, bringing together disabled children, young people and their families from across our community. It will be a day full of empowering activities and moments of inspiration, helping young people see what's possible for their future.
- The development and launch of our new Umbrella strategy, shaping how we support families for years to come.
- A year of raising awareness, sharing stories, celebrating impact and highlighting the voices of disabled children and young adults.

This anniversary year is about laying strong foundations for the next 40 years of Umbrella – and we'd love you to be part of it. Your support through fundraising, partnerships, volunteering and sharing our message will help make this a truly special and impactful year.

Thank you for being part of our journey so far – we can't wait to show you what's next.



Want to get involved in our 40th Anniversary Celebrations?

This year, Umbrella turns 40 – and we'd love to celebrate with the people who make our community so special. We're looking for staff, volunteers, service users and supporters who would like to get involved, whether that's sharing memories, helping shape our celebrations, or being part of our 40 stories project. If you'd like to help in any way, we'd love to hear from you.




Interested?

Contact: Elysse.lee@Umbrella.uk.net



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