



**STRM - SEND the Right Message**  
Registered Charity 1193572



# Annual Report

Reporting Period: April 2025 – March 2026

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
<b>SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Our Mission & Vision	4
1.2 Our Story	4
1.3 Our Values – The GUIDE Framework	5
1.4 Chief Executive’s Report	6
1.5 Highlights of 2025/26	9
1.6 Acknowledgements	10
<b>SECTION 2 GOVERNANCE</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 Our Charity Structure & Approach	11
2.2 Board of Trustees	12
2.3 Safeguarding, HR & Health and Safety	14
2.4 Data Protection & GDPR Compliance	14
2.5 Risk Oversight & Strategic Planning	14
2.6 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion	15
2.7 Chair’s Foreword	16
<b>SECTION 3 OBJECTIVES &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>18</b>
3.1 Charitable Objects	18
3.2 Our Year in Action 2025–2026	18
3.3 STRM Impact at a Glance	19
3.4 Who We Support	23
3.5 Early Intervention & Family Navigation	23
3.6 Young People’s Participation	24
3.7 Training & Early Intervention	26
3.8 Financial Wellbeing Support Services	29
3.9 Energy & Cost of Living Support	29
3.10 Additional Practical Support	30
3.11 Community & Christmas Events	31
3.12 Supporting Your Neurodivergent Child Resource – National Reach	34
3.13 Community Partnerships & Collaboration	35
3.14 Amplifying Lived Experience & Influencing Change	36
3.15 Digital Development & CRM Upgrade	38
3.16 Social Media Reach & Campaigns	39
3.17 Impact Measurement & Evaluation	40

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
3.18 Outcomes & Impact Summary	41
3.19 Referral Pathways & Navigation	42
3.20 STRM Whole-Family Support Model	42
3.21 Our Projects	43
3.22 Cost of Living Support	44
3.23 Volunteers, Workforce & Trustee Board	45
<b>SECTION 4 FINANCE</b>	<b>46</b>
4.1 Treasurer’s Report – Overview Finance Report	46
4.2 Opening Position	46
4.3 Statement of Activities	46
4.4 Income Overview – Key Funders	46
4.5 Expenditure Summary	47
4.6 Restricted & Unrestricted Funds	47
4.7 Closing Balance	47
4.8 Reserves & Sustainability	47
4.9 Financial Commentary	48
4.10 Summary	48
<b>SECTION 5 FINANCIAL SUMMARY &amp; HIGHLIGHTS</b>	<b>48</b>
5.1 Income & Expenditure Growth	48
5.2 Income Breakdown	49
5.3 Financial Highlights 2025/26	49
5.4 Independent Examiner’s Report and Financial Statements	49
<b>SECTION 6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>50</b>
6.1 Delivery Sites & Community Spaces	50
6.2 Corporate & Local Business Supporters	50
6.3 Volunteer Highlights & Community Supporters	51
6.4 Volunteer Highlight: Michelle	53
6.5 Legacy Giving & Community Recognition	53
6.6 Fundraising Hero: Andy & Family	54
6.7 Ethical Fundraising & Transparency Statement	55
<b>SECTION 7 LOOKING AHEAD 2026/27</b>	<b>56</b>
7.1 Strengthening Foundations, Expanding Reach, Transforming Support	56
7.2 Highlights & Priorities for 2026/27	57

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Our Mission & Vision

### Mission:

To improve the lives of families in Southend and Essex where a child or young person (aged 0–25) is neurodivergent or disabled, by providing inclusive, peer-led support.

### Vision:

A future where families are empowered, connected, and supported to thrive with neurodivergent and disabled children reaching their full potential.



## 1.2 Our Story

STRM – SEND the Right Message Charity was established to improve the lives of families across Southend, Castle Point, Rochford and wider Essex who are caring for children and young people with identified or suspected special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Founded in 2019 by Maggie Cleary, following her experience navigating the SEND system, STRM was created in response to a clear gap: families were overwhelmed, isolated, and unable to access timely, clear support when they needed it most.

Through connecting with other families, it became clear these experiences were not isolated but reflected wider challenges within SEND support. Families described uncertainty around available pathways and the impact of delays or unmet needs on children’s mental health and overall family well-being.

In response, STRM was created as a trusted space where families can feel understood, access practical guidance, and build confidence in navigating the SEND system.

SEND the Right Message Charity (STRM) was formally constituted and registered on 17 February 2021. We are a by-parents, for-parents organisation, rooted in lived experience, offering early intervention, peer-led support, and clear, practical information.

**Our work helps reduce isolation, prevent escalation to crisis, and support families from first concerns through to their ongoing SEND journeys.**

**STRM continues to grow as a trusted, community-led organisation, supporting families locally while contributing to wider conversations about improving SEND systems.**

## 1.3 Our Values – The GUIDE Framework

At STRM, our approach has always been shaped by a commitment to inclusiveness, empowerment, integrity and support for families.

### Our GUIDE Values

Over time, we have developed this into a clearer values framework: **Growth, Understanding, Integrity, Diversity and Encouragement (GUIDE)**. This provides a simple and consistent way to reflect how we work and what families can expect from STRM.

These values underpin our family-led approach and highlight the importance of building confidence, recognising difference and creating supportive, inclusive spaces where families can thrive.

Since introducing these values last year, we have continued to embed them across STRM, including within our recent staff recruitment, helping ensure that everyone involved reflects these principles in their work and interactions with our beneficiaries.



### Growth:

**We learn, adapt, and evolve together with the families and communities we serve.**



### Understanding:

**We listen first and respond with empathy, recognising every individual journey.**



### Integrity:

**We act transparently and ethically, ensuring accountability in all we do.**



### Diversity:

**We celebrate difference and actively promote equality, inclusion, and accessibility.**



### Encouragement:

**We empower families and volunteers to build confidence, resilience, and hope.**

## 1.4 Chief Executive's Report

### STRM – SEND the Right Message Charity

Reporting Period: April 2025 – March 2026

This year, STRM has continued to grow as a trusted, parent-led charity supporting neurodivergent and disabled children and young people and their families. Through community outreach, peer support and inclusive activities, we have helped families feel less alone, more confident, and better able to navigate their journey.



Supporting over 2,500 families across Essex, offering early support when it's needed most – not when a threshold is met.

This has been a year of continued growth, deep learning, and strengthened foundations. As a parent-led organisation, everything we do is grounded in lived experience. We understand first-hand the realities of raising neurodivergent and disabled children within systems that can feel complex, fragmented, and difficult to navigate. This insight shapes our approach, ensuring families feel heard, supported, and better understood, while promoting acceptance, celebrating difference, and helping to normalise neurodivergence within our communities.

Over the past year, we have expanded our reach and deepened our support. We have strengthened delivery across our core areas while making our open-access offer across Essex clearer and easier to navigate. Alongside this, we have provided more targeted support for registered members in Castle Point, Rochford District, and Southend. Through peer support, children's activities, and guidance sessions, we have created safe, welcoming environments where families can share experiences, build confidence, and access practical support.

Families feel more confident, less isolated, and better able to support their children after engaging with STRM.

We are particularly proud of the continued reach of our Supporting Your Neurodivergent Child resource. Over the past year, it has been reviewed and strengthened to ensure it remains relevant, accessible, and reflective of the real challenges families face. It continues to support thousands of families in understanding their child's needs and navigating next steps with greater clarity.

Alongside delivery, STRM has continued to play an active role in raising awareness and contributing to wider conversations around SEND. We have worked to influence both local and national understanding, ensuring that families' voices are represented in discussions that shape services and support.

#### Sector Context & Our Role

Across the sector, organisations are responding to rising need in different ways, including therapeutic support, training, and assessment pathways. At STRM, we see our role as working alongside these services, complementing statutory and clinical provision by supporting families within their communities.

What remains less visible is the day-to-day reality for families navigating these systems, often facing unclear pathways, long delays, and the responsibility of coordinating their own support.

At the same time, voluntary and community sector organisations are working within increasing demand and limited resources, while continuing to play a critical role in early support, early intervention, and trusted, community-based services shaped by lived experience.



#### Helping families access the right support earlier – reducing escalation and preventing crisis.

Our work sits within this space, providing early, practical support that helps families make sense of their situation and take the next steps. By working alongside families, partners, and local systems, we aim to reduce escalation, build confidence, and contribute to a more joined-up, place-based approach. This includes aligning with NHS Integrated Neighbourhood Teams to support

Despite these challenges, we consistently see the difference that early, community-based support can make for families.

coordinated responses across health, education, social care, and community services.

As Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) continues to develop, it will be essential that partnership working, local knowledge, and community-led support remain central to future system design, ensuring families continue to receive consistent, accessible and responsive support.



## A Year of Foundations

This has been a year of building strong foundations to support sustainable growth. Alongside continued delivery, we have strengthened governance, developed our team, and established a structured volunteer programme to increase capacity and resilience.

We have prioritised clearer roles and responsibilities, strengthened governance systems, and ensured our policies and procedures are fit for purpose. This has included embedding safer recruitment practices and developing a values-led volunteer programme to support long-term delivery.

While much of this work takes place behind the scenes, it is essential to ensuring STRM can grow safely, sustainably, and continue to meet the needs of families.

Our work continues to show that early, community-led support makes a real difference. Families tell us they feel more informed, more confident, and better able to advocate for and support their children after engaging with STRM.



## Community at the Heart of STRM

STRM exists because families show up, share their experiences, and trust us to walk alongside them.

To our families, volunteers, trustees, partners and wider community — thank you. This work only happens because of you.



## Looking Ahead

As we look ahead, our focus remains on sustainability, growth, and deepening our impact. We are committed to strengthening our support pathways, expanding access to our services, and continuing to advocate for a system that better understands and responds to the needs of neurodivergent and disabled children and young people and their families.

We believe that when families are supported in understanding their child's needs, navigating systems with confidence, and feeling part of a community, better outcomes follow — not just for individuals, but for families as a whole.



With heartfelt thanks,

**Maggie Cleary**  
Chief Executive Officer

## 1.5 Highlights of 2025/26



**153**  
**Direct financial**  
and practical support provided, including Family & Food Project, Hygiene Packs, Household Support Fund Vouchers, Fuel Bank Vouchers and Food Bank referrals  
Providing immediate support with food, essential items and financial assistance to families facing financial pressure

### Cadent Project Support Delivered

- 723 carbon monoxide (CO) safety conversations
- 972 CO safety leaflets distributed (including community outreach)
- 76 carbon monoxide alarms provided
- 595 conversations on efficient use of appliances
- 579 conversations supporting condensation and damp
- 511 one-to-one Priority Services Register (PSR) conversations
- 163 PSR sign-ups completed
- 895 PSR leaflets shared

### Supporting Families Financially

- 418 Disability Living Allowance (DLA) interactions
- 361 Carer's Allowance interactions
- 352 Personal Independence Payment (PIP) interactions
- 172 Warm Home Discount interactions
- 164 Universal Credit interactions
- Families supported to understand entitlements and access financial support
- Increased confidence navigating complex systems
- Reduced financial pressure at critical points

### Energy Saving & Household Support

- 61 slow cookers provided
- 50 cookbooks distributed (22 during Gas Safety Week, 28 through community events)
- Supporting families to reduce energy costs
- Enabling access to simple, low-effort meal options



## GOVERNANCE

### 2.1 Our Charity Structure & Approach

STRM is a family-led, community-based charity, shaped by lived experience. This approach ensures that both strategic direction and day-to-day delivery remain closely connected to the needs of the families we support.

**STRM operates in line with Charity Commission guidance and recognised best practice for small charities.**

### Board of Trustees

STRM is governed by a Board of five Trustees, each bringing direct lived experience of caring for a child or young person with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This ensures that strategic oversight and decision-making remain grounded and relevant to the families we serve.

### Operational Structure

Led by our Chief Executive Officer, STRM is supported by a small team of paid staff and dedicated volunteers, many of whom share lived experience. This ensures that STRM remains a genuinely family-led organisation, with informed and authentic decision-making at every level.

Over the past year, we have continued to strengthen our operational capacity through the development of a dedicated Family Support Team. This includes roles such as an Early Intervention Pathway Coordinator, Family Support Coordinator and Peer Support Worker, alongside an HR and Wellbeing Assistant.

We have also introduced a Business Manager role, which has taken on key operational responsibilities, supporting the day-to-day running and sustainability of the organisation.

Alongside this, we continue to build and develop our volunteer programme, creating more opportunities for individuals to contribute their lived experience and support families within the community.

### Lived Experience-Led Approach

Lived experience is central to STRM's work. Many of our Trustees, staff and volunteers are parents or carers who have navigated SEND pathways themselves.

#### This enables STRM to:

- build trust and relatability with families
- provide practical, experience-based guidance
- design services that reflect real needs and challenges

### Accessibility and Flexible Delivery

We recognise that families face a range of barriers when accessing support, including financial, health-related, digital, cultural and logistical challenges.

In response, STRM delivers support in ways that are flexible and accessible:

- an online forum and self-help resources for ongoing connection
- flexible appointments, including in-person, virtual and out-of-hours support
- resources and comprehensive signposting
- community-based and pop-up sessions to reach families locally

### Commitment to Inclusive Environments

- STRM is committed to creating welcoming, inclusive and safe spaces for all families following our GUIDE Values
- reasonable adjustments are considered across all settings
- diversity across culture, neurotype, disability, gender and age is respected and celebrated
- confidentiality and a non-judgemental approach underpin all interactions

### Community Roots

- STRM was founded through grassroots networks of SEND parents, and this continues to shape the organisation today.
- We remain committed to ensuring that our work reflects the voices, experiences and needs of the families we support.

### Understanding Marginalisation

- We recognise that disability and caring responsibilities can lead to isolation and barriers to support.
- By centring lived experience and delivering support flexibly, STRM actively works to reduce these barriers and reach families who may otherwise struggle to access support.

## 2.2 Board of Trustees

### Trustee Responsibilities

Our Trustees act in accordance with the *Charities Act 2011* and the Charity Commission (CC3) guidance.

The Board meets regularly to provide oversight of STRM's strategy, finances, safeguarding and quality assurance, ensuring the charity operates effectively and in line with its objectives.

Individual Trustees hold designated lead responsibilities across key areas, including safeguarding, finance, HR and health and safety.

All Trustees complete conflict of interest declarations and withdraw from decisions where appropriate. Trustee induction includes an overview of legal duties, STRM's mission and safeguarding responsibilities, alongside completion of trustee eligibility declarations.

We also encourage continuous learning and reflective practice to ensure the Board remains informed, effective and responsive.

### Principles of Public Life

STRM is committed to upholding the Nolan Principles of Public Life, which guide the conduct and behaviour of Trustees, staff and volunteers or decisions and actions

These principles are:

- **Selflessness** – acting in the best interests of the charity and its beneficiaries
- **Integrity** – avoiding conflicts of interest and acting with honesty
- **Objectivity** – making decisions fairly and on merit
- **Accountability** – being responsible for decisions and actions
- **Openness** – being transparent in our work and decision-making
- **Honesty** – acting truthfully and with integrity
- **Leadership** – promoting and demonstrating these principles through our actions

These principles underpin STRM's governance and decision-making, ensuring that the organisation operates with integrity, transparency and accountability

### Trustee Biographies

#### Bob – Chair of Trustees

Bob is a retired IT and telecommunications professional with experience in engineering, project management, and service delivery. During his career, he led teams and managed complex projects, developing a strong understanding of quality, data security, and good operational practice.

As Chair of Trustees, Bob supports STRM by providing steady leadership, governance oversight, and challenge, helping ensure the charity remains well-run, accountable, and sustainable.

#### Brian – Trustee & Joint Vice Chair

Brian is an IT Specialist Engineer and former local councillor with extensive experience in governance, scrutiny, and public accountability. His previous roles include Vice Chair of South Essex Homes and membership of audit, appeals, and development control committees.

Brian currently sits on the Southend Fostering Panel and holds leadership roles within community organisations. As the parent of an autistic and ADHD child, he brings strong advocacy skills and insight into service gaps affecting SEND families.

#### Clare – Trustee

Clare is the mother of two boys and has extensive experience in recruitment, training, sales, and management, including work with charitable organisations.

She is passionate about equity, diversity, and inclusion and understands how inclusive cultures strengthen organisations. Through her involvement in Pride and parent support groups, Clare has seen the value of mentoring, shared experience, and flexible approaches to learning and development.

Clare supports STRM with recruitment, workforce development, and organisational growth, helping ensure EDI principles are embedded across the charity.

#### Ann – Trustee

Ann has worked as Road Services Director at Quattro Plant for many years and brings senior leadership experience to STRM.

Alongside her professional career, Ann co-founded the charity HAE UK and later became its Chair. Through this work, she has been involved in fundraising, awareness-raising, and improving understanding of a rare condition, including contributing to national media, broadcasting, and parliamentary discussions.

Ann brings experience in governance, communications, and charity leadership to STRM, alongside first-hand experience of supporting children with additional needs.



## 2.3 Safeguarding, HR & Health and Safety

### Safeguarding

STRM operates under a robust Safeguarding Policy, which is regularly reviewed and has been recently updated in line with current guidance. All staff and volunteers receive induction and refresher training to ensure they understand their responsibilities, including safer recruitment practices within employment.

Named Safeguarding Leads are in place to respond promptly to concerns, ensuring that every child, young person and adult engaging with STRM is safe and supported. The Chief Executive Officer, Trustee Safeguarding Lead and Business Manager are trained to Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) Level 5.

Safeguarding is embedded across all aspects of our work and is regularly reviewed to ensure it remains aligned with current guidance, including *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2026)*.

### Health & Safety

- STRM maintains clear procedures to ensure safe delivery across all activities.
- This includes:
  - risk assessments for sessions and events
  - lone working procedures
  - use of safe and appropriate venues
  - appropriate insurance cover
- Policies, procedures and staff training are reviewed regularly to support safe and effective delivery, including safeguarding, safer recruitment, trauma-aware practice and Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism.



### HR & Safer Recruitment

- All staff and volunteer appointments follow safer recruitment practices, including DBS checks, Right to Work checks where appropriate, and the taking up of references.
- Our HR Trustee provides oversight of HR policies, compliance and staff wellbeing.
- Volunteers are supported through clear role descriptions, structured onboarding and ongoing supervision, ensuring safe and consistent delivery of services.

### 2.4 Data Protection & GDPR Compliance

- STRM is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and operates in line with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act.
- Our Data Protection Policy outlines how personal information is collected, stored and safeguarded. Secure systems, clear privacy notices and transparent consent processes are in place to ensure data is handled responsibly.
- We have embedded clear data retention and data destruction procedures, ensuring that personal information is only retained for as long as necessary and securely disposed of in line with legal and regulatory requirements.
- Regular reviews, audits and staff training support continued compliance, confidentiality and high standards of data handling across the organisation.

### 2.5 Risk Oversight & Strategic Planning

Trustees maintain oversight of organisational risk across key areas, including safeguarding, finance, service delivery and reputation.

Risks are reviewed regularly as part of Board discussions, ensuring appropriate mitigation is in place and that STRM can respond proactively to emerging challenges.

During the reporting period, STRM developed and implemented a formal Risk Register, embedded within Board governance processes and supporting the structured monitoring and management of risks across the organisation.

### Strategic Planning, Delegation and Accountability

Trustees oversee STRM's long-term direction, budget planning and annual priorities, with clear delegation of responsibilities to the Chief Executive Officer and operational team to support effective day-to-day delivery.

During the reporting period, key focus areas included:

- strengthening organisational capacity
- embedding safer recruitment training and practices
- developing our business plan
- strengthening fundraising and diversifying income streams
- enhancing family support and navigation across key areas
- preparing the organisation to secure multi-year funding by strengthening governance and systems
- developing an environmentally sustainable policy and approach

STRM maintains accountability through independent financial examination, transparent reporting and ongoing engagement with the families we support.

This approach is supported by STRM's formal Risk Register and Scheme of Delegation, which is embedded within Board governance processes and reviewed regularly by Trustees. It ensures that risks are identified, monitored and managed proactively across all areas of the organisation.

### 2.6 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

At STRM, equality, diversity and inclusion are not just principles, but are embedded across how we design, deliver and develop our work.

As a by-and-for organisation, shaped by lived experience, we recognise that families of neurodivergent and disabled children often face additional barriers to accessing support. Our approach is focused on reducing these barriers and ensuring that support is accessible, inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of our community.

We also recognise that many families may be navigating complex or stressful experiences, and we take a trauma-aware approach. This means creating environments that are safe, respectful and supportive, where families feel understood and not judged.

We are committed to:

- recognising and valuing different experiences, identities and perspectives
- co-producing accessible and inclusive services alongside families
- actively identifying and reducing barriers to accessing support
- creating safe, welcoming and non-judgemental spaces
- embedding a trauma-aware approach across our services
- listening to and learning from our community to continuously improve

### Progress This Year

- Over 75% of Trustees, staff and volunteers have lived experience of disability or a caring role, ensuring our work remains representative and grounded in the communities we support
- Continued to create accessible, inclusive spaces through flexible delivery, community-based support and reasonable adjustments
- Completed the Cranfield Trust *Journey to Excellence* programme, supporting the development of STRM's governance, leadership and organisational resilience



### Looking Ahead

- We recognise the need to further strengthen our reach into underrepresented and marginalised communities. Over the next year, we will focus on building relationships, improving accessibility and ensuring our support is inclusive of a wider range of cultural, social and community needs.

## 2.7 Chair's Foreword

### Chair of Trustees Annual Report

#### 1. Introduction from the Chair

I'm pleased to share this year's Chair of Trustees report for SEND The Right Message (STRM).

This has been a year of steady growth, stronger foundations, and continued commitment to the families we support. As demand continues to rise, STRM has remained focused on providing clear, practical, and compassionate support to disabled and neurodivergent children, young people, and their families across Castle Point, Rochford Districts and Southend.

Everything we do is shaped by lived experience. Families navigating the SEND system often face confusion, delays, and uncertainty, and it is their voices that continue to guide our priorities, our services, and our decisions.

I would like to thank our trustees, staff, volunteers, partners, and supporters. Your continued commitment has enabled STRM to grow in both reach and impact, even within an increasingly complex landscape.

This year also brought change within the Board. I stepped into the role of Chair following Tricia Cowdrey and would like to sincerely thank her for her leadership and the strong foundations she helped establish.

We also said farewell to several trustees — Vicki, Rebecca, Caroline and Alison — each of whom made a valued contribution to STRM. We are grateful for their time, commitment, and the role they played in shaping the organisation.

At the same time, I am pleased to welcome Ann Harding as our new Fundraising Trustee. We are also actively recruiting for Treasurer and Secretary roles to further strengthen the Board.

This year marked STRM's 5th anniversary, an important milestone. What began as a parent-led response to unmet need has grown into a respected, community-rooted charity supporting thousands of families. This reflects the dedication of our CEO, Maggie Cleary, and a committed team of staff, volunteers, and trustees.

We continue to be incredibly proud of the recognition STRM has received this year. In particular, *Supporting Your Neurodivergent Child*, co-produced by Maggie, CEO, with Myotas Charity and Essex Family Forum, has now reached over 19,000 families across Essex and was shortlisted nationally through the Children's Disabled Council National SEND Awards April 2026, where it was shortlisted in the *Partnership with the VCSE Sector* category.

We were also proud to see our inclusive bouldering programme recognised through a local sports club award, highlighting the importance of accessible, community-based opportunities for neurodivergent children and young people.

These recognitions reflect the strength of STRM's work and the difference it is making.

Over the past year, Maggie, as CEO, alongside Vicky, has worked incredibly hard to lay a strong foundation for this work. My sincere thanks to them both for their dedication and impact.

#### 2. Our Mission and Strategic Focus

STRM exists to make things clearer and more manageable for families.

We provide accessible information, practical guidance, and a supportive community where families feel understood and not alone. We also continue to advocate for the rights of neurodivergent children and young people.

This year, our strategic focus centred on four key areas:

- Strengthening governance and compliance to support sustainable growth
- Expanding our support offer for families navigating SEND processes
- Building meaningful partnerships with local services, schools, and community organisations
- Increasing our visibility and influence within the local SEND landscape



These priorities have guided our decision-making and ensured our work remains responsive to the needs of the families we serve.

#### 3. Key Achievements

This has been a year of meaningful progress for STRM.

We have supported more families than ever through workshops, guidance sessions, and inclusive peer support. Alongside this, we have strengthened the organisation behind the scenes and improved governance, safeguarding, and operational systems to support safe, high-quality delivery.

We have continued to develop practical, accessible resources that families can use in real life, and strengthened relationships with schools, services, and community partners.

We have also increased trustee capacity, bringing in new skills and perspectives to support the charity's development.

Behind all of this is real impact, families feeling more informed, more confident, and better supported to navigate the challenges they face.

#### 4. Governance and Board Development

A key priority this year has been strengthening governance to ensure STRM is well-positioned for sustainable growth.

We have:

- Established sub-committees with clear roles and responsibilities
- Undertaken a board skills audit
- Updated key governance policies, including safeguarding and financial procedures
- Strengthened oversight of risk, compliance, and financial management
- Improved board reporting, meeting structures, and decision-making
- Clarified trustee roles, responsibilities, and expectations

These improvements reflect our commitment to transparency, accountability, and best practice.



#### 5. Financial Overview

STRM remains in a stable financial position.

Income continues to come from a mix of grants, donations, and community fundraising. We have ensured that resources are directed where they are most needed, frontline delivery, alongside essential governance and operational support.

Financial oversight has strengthened this year, and we are continuing to build reserves in line with a prudent and sustainable approach.

We will continue to explore funding opportunities to support growth and long-term stability.

#### 6. Challenges and Risks

The SEND landscape continues to present significant challenges.

Families are still facing barriers in accessing timely and appropriate support, and demand continues to grow.

This year, STRM has navigated:

- Increasing demand for support
- Capacity pressures as the organisation grows
- A competitive and uncertain funding environment
- The need to balance service delivery with organisational development

We continue to respond by strengthening our systems, prioritising impact, and maintaining a clear focus on the families we support.

## 7. Priorities for the Year Ahead

Looking ahead, STRM will focus on:

- Expanding our support offer through workshops, guidance, and accessible resources
- Strengthening partnerships with local authorities, schools, and community organisations
- Continuing to build governance capacity and trustee expertise
- Enhancing our digital presence to improve accessibility and reach
- Securing sustainable funding to support long-term growth

Our aim remains clear to ensure families can access support earlier, more easily, and with greater confidence.



## OUR OBJECTIVES & ACTIVITIES

### 3.1 Charitable Objects

Our charitable objects are:

For the public benefit, the relief of neurodivergent and disabled children, young people, and adults and their parents or carers in Essex and Southend, in particular, but not exclusively, by:

- Providing support services, assistance, information, activities, and training programmes.
- Relieving financial hardship.
- Creating opportunities for respite breaks.
- Promoting social inclusion and raising awareness and acceptance.
- Developing and promoting innovative and early interventions for the health and well-being of beneficiaries.

### 3.2 Our Year in Action 2025–2026

Over the past year, STRM has reached more families across Southend, Castle Point, Rochford and wider Essex, while continuing to build support that meets families at different stages of their journey.

Across the year, we:

- delivered consistent peer support, bouldering sessions, workshops and one-to-one support
- launched and developed new projects, including early intervention pathways
- responded to cost-of-living pressures and the Disability price tag through practical support and partnerships
- strengthened our community presence through events, campaigns and collaboration



### 3.3 STRM Impact at a Glance

A year of growth, connection and early intervention across Essex

#### April – June 2025

- Delivered cost-of-living support sessions and distributed hygiene packs to families
- Raised awareness about ADHD Shared Care Postcode Lottery
- Continued Inclusive Bouldering sessions, supporting confidence and participation
- Facilitated MP parent carer engagement, amplifying lived experience
- Marked International Women's Day, raising awareness of ADHD and menopause
- Designed and launched the TASK Project in partnership with Raw Learning CIC
- Introduced structured early intervention pathway on registration, tools and family resources
- Expanded DLA and benefits support, including the STRM Sentence Bank
- Paused new registrations to upgrade CRM systems and strengthen referral pathways
- Integrated energy advice and cost-of-living support through Cadent



### Fundraising & Community Support

- Supported community-led fundraising, including a parent table-top sale
- Supported a charity curry night fundraiser with families
- Increased community involvement in supporting STRM's work

Strengthened early intervention and improved how families access support



## 8. Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to STRM this year.

Our volunteers, partners, and supporters play a vital role in enabling our work. Most importantly, we thank the families and young people who share their experiences with us. Their insight continues to shape and strengthen everything we do.

## 9. Looking Ahead

I look ahead with confidence in STRM's direction and purpose.

As Chair of Trustees, I remain committed to supporting the organisation through both opportunities and challenges, working alongside the Board and our CEO, Maggie Cleary, whose leadership continues to drive STRM forward.

There is still much to do but there is also strong momentum, clear purpose, and a shared commitment to making a difference.

With warm regards,

Bob Carr

**Chair of Trustees**



## July – September 2025

- Delivered summer support, including hygiene packs and essential items
- Introduced Summer Regulation Packs to support routines and emotional regulation
- Distributed slow cookers and practical energy-saving support
- Reopened registrations following CRM improvements
- Relunched Inclusive Bouldering (term-time provision)
- Expanded Tea & Talk, including a venue in Thundersley
- Supported families through school transitions and changing routines
- Attended the Youth Summit Showcase hosted by Bayo Alaba, strengthening local partnerships and raising awareness of SEND support.
- Maintained strong outreach and engagement across all areas



### Fundraising & Community Support

- Promoted and supported Andy's London fundraising run
- Strengthened community engagement through local events and outreach

Increased reach, improved access, and reconnected families following system improvements



## October – December 2025

- Began review of the updated Supporting Your Neurodivergent Child resource
- Expanded delivery locations, including STRM HQ
- Delivered Inclusive Bouldering alongside seasonal activities
- Hosted Southend Halloween Parade and Christmas children community event
- Delivered Carers Christmas event and Toy Drive
- Joan was recognised with a Volunteer Award
- Facilitated a Christmas Volunteer appreciation events
- Delivered Centre of Warmth support in partnership with Cadent
- Continued structured support, training and early help
- Proudly accepted an award for Bouldering Club

### Fundraising, Grants & Donations

- Secured National Lottery funding
- Secured funding from Southend Community Investment Board and Rochford District Council
- Received donations from local businesses supporting Christmas activities
- Supported toy drives and seasonal giving initiatives

Expanded provision, strengthened infrastructure, and increased sustainability





### January – March 2026

- Delivered Tea & Talk sessions across multiple locations (open-access peer support)
- Delivered Making Sense of SEND and Eating & Neurodivergence sessions
- Supported families with EHCPs, benefits and SEND navigation
- Delivered high-volume cost-of-living support, including vouchers and slow cookers
- Delivered Inclusive Bouldering (term-time provision)
- Provided energy advice, PSR registrations and safety awareness through Cadent
- Shared SEND resources, including Supporting Your Neurodivergent Child
- Took part in Eating Disorder Awareness Week, sharing ARFID lived experience
- Attended VCSE and Integrated Neighbourhood events and Early Years event.
- Strengthened partnerships with MyOTAS, and SAFE
- Returned to the Essex Autism Partnership Board
- Celebrated 5 years of STRM with a community raffle
- Welcomed new staff and volunteers, increasing capacity
- Prepared and launched the Neurospicy Minds Women's Group (fully booked pre-launch)
- Continued raising awareness of SEND policy and support pathways

#### Fundraising & Community Support

- Delivered a 5-year anniversary community raffle
- Received donations from local supporters and partners



#### Consolidated growth, strengthened influence, and expanded support pathways

All activities delivered during this reporting period align with these objectives, with a strong emphasis on early help, lived experience, and community-led solutions.

### 3.4 Who We Support

STRM supports children and young people aged 0–25 with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families across Essex, with a core focus on Southend, Castle Point and Rochford.

We work with families at all stages, from early concerns through to diagnosis, education challenges and transition into adulthood.

A diagnosis is not required. Many families are navigating waiting lists or gaps in statutory support.

Our support is family-focused, recognising the impact on children and young people, parent carers and siblings, as well as family relationships, routines, emotional wellbeing and overall household stability.

#### Geographical Area

**Our membership spans a wide geographic area, with 1,331 members mapped by postcode, demonstrating both strong local reach and wider demand for support:**

- **SS2:** 212 members
- **SS9:** 180 members
- **SS3:** 168 members
- **SS7 (Benfleet, Hadleigh, Thundersley):** 164 members
- **SS0:** 151 members
- **SS4:** 102 members
- **SS1:** 98 members
- **SS6:** 95 members
- **SS8 (Canvey Island):** 86 members
- **SS5:** 71 members
- Plus out-of-area engagement



This distribution highlights that families are accessing STRM across a diverse range of communities, including both more and less socio-economically advantaged areas.

Importantly, this data challenges common assumptions about need. It shows that disability, neurodivergence and the challenges associated with navigating support systems are not confined to particular postcodes or income levels. While financial resources can influence a family's ability to access private support or mitigate pressures, the underlying need for clear pathways, timely intervention and trusted guidance remains consistent.

This reinforces that gaps in support are systemic rather than location-specific and that families across all communities benefit from accessible, early, and community-based support.

### 3.5 Early Intervention & Family Navigation

We aim to support families at the earliest stage. This includes families who are waiting for assessment, exploring disability and/or neurodivergence, or are unsure what to do next.

We help families understand their child's needs, navigate systems and services, take practical next steps, feel more confident and less alone, reduce isolation and overwhelm, and build a sense of community.

We deliver community-based projects and early intervention, holistic support that complements the medical model, working alongside statutory services to provide timely help while families wait.

We take a strengths-based approach, focusing on understanding, radical resilience, and potential, not just need.

Our peer support and activities offer safe, informal spaces where parents and carers can connect, share experiences, and access trusted support across our services, support sessions, and community activities.

Our support sessions provide a space where parents and carers feel safe, understood and able to be around others who get it, enabling them to talk openly, connect with others, and access practical support and guidance.

Our moderated online community supports over 2,100 members, providing daily connection, shared experiences and ongoing peer support between sessions.

We also create opportunities for families to shape our work through co-production, ensuring their experiences inform our services and helping to amplify parent carer voices.



### 3.6 Young People's Participation

Now in its fifth year, our Inclusive Bouldering Programme provides a safe, flexible and supportive space where children and young people with SEND can take part in physical activity in a way that works for them, while parents and carers access support at the same time through connection, conversation, shared experience and direct access to STRM family support.

As a gateway sport, bouldering offers an alternative for children who are unable to access mainstream activities. It enables them to challenge themselves in a low-demand, supportive environment. After a full day at school, children can unmask, be themselves, and spend time with others who understand them.

Bouldering supports both physical and emotional development, helping children build confidence, coordination, balance and overall wellbeing. It also supports emotional regulation, problem-solving and independence, particularly for those who may find social communication or structured environments challenging. As an early intervention, it provides a positive outlet for energy while helping children develop resilience, self-belief and a sense of belonging.



#### Impact in Practice

- **Free to access**, removing financial barriers and ensuring families can take part regardless of income.
- Children who were initially anxious or reluctant are now taking part.
- **Confidence is growing** week by week through consistent engagement.
- Families are forming connections and reducing isolation.
- Children are developing physical skills, emotional regulation and independence.
- Parents are accessing **STRM support** alongside their child, including guidance, signposting and practical family support.



- 817 activity attendances
- 81 children and young people supported
- 67 parents and carers engaged in STRM family support



Children are building confidence, trying new things and developing a sense of achievement, while parents are feeling less isolated, building connections and gaining a better understanding of their child. This dual approach means families are supported together – not separately – strengthening relationships, reducing overwhelm and improving overall family wellbeing.



#### Case Study

Child A is a young neurodivergent person with anxiety who found it difficult to access mainstream environments, including school. We first met them and their mother at a STRM session, where her family recognised the potential benefits of bouldering but also the barriers, particularly anxiety and a lack of trust in new settings.

With patience and consistent support, Child A became familiar with the environment before taking part. After three months, they felt ready to join a session.

Since then, she has continued to attend regularly, building confidence, trust and a sense of belonging.

This journey highlights the importance of creating safe, understanding environments where children can engage at their own pace. By building trust and surrounding children with supportive adults and peers who understand their needs, we enable access where it might not otherwise be possible.



#### What Families Told Us

Families consistently report increased confidence, improved well-being, and a sense of belonging.

**“Brilliant group! My child feels safe and supported, and it has made such a difference.”**

**“These sessions have given my child a real sense of achievement. Their confidence and skills have grown so much.”**

**“As a parent, I’ve seen first-hand the impact this has had. My child is more positive, more confident and looks forward to every session.”**

#### Breaking Down Barriers to Access

Many children are unable to access team sports and mainstream activities due to the environment, expectations and cost. This programme provides an alternative that allows children to take part in a way that works for them, while supporting families at the same time.



### 3.7 Training & Early Intervention

#### Making Sense of Neurodivergence- Autism & ADHD Parent Support Course (3-Hour Session) Before & After Diagnosis

STRM delivered two co-produced lived experience-led Autism and Adhd Parent Courses designed to reduce emotional overwhelm, increase confidence, and strengthen family stability.

The course sits within STRM's wider early intervention pathway, beginning with open-access guidance and continuing through peer support, practical advice, and financial navigation.

The outcomes demonstrate clear, measurable short-term impact, particularly for parents entering the course with the highest levels of need.

Indicative modelling suggests a potential social return of between **1.4:1** and **3.5:1**, depending on escalation assumptions. Even under conservative modelling, the programme offsets a significant proportion of its delivery cost through short-term system savings.



#### Context: Neurodivergence, Inequality and the Disability Price Tag

Families raising neurodivergent children often experience emotional distress alongside financial pressure. Participants included families at different stages of their journey, including those awaiting diagnosis, those navigating life post-diagnosis, and parents managing complex school-based SEND processes.

Many parents reported high levels of emotional overwhelm, often compounded by the financial realities of the "disability price tag".

This included:

- Increased food and energy costs
- Transport to appointments
- Specialist resources
- Reduced parental income
- Employment instability linked to caring responsibilities



Emotional stress and financial strain frequently interact, increasing the risk of escalation across health, education, and safeguarding systems.

This programme helps reduce health inequalities by improving early access to knowledge, navigation, and community-based support for families who may otherwise struggle to access specialist services.

#### The Courses

The Autism and ADHD Before & After Course is parent-led and co-produced by diagnosed Autistic and ADHD facilitators with lived experience of raising neurodivergent children.

The session provides a structured, supportive environment where families can learn, reflect, and connect.

The course includes:

- Education on sensory processing and executive functioning
- Regulation and co-regulation strategies
- Reframing behaviour as communication
- Facilitated peer discussion
- Structured signposting to further support

Delivery is underpinned by STRM's safeguarding framework, with trained staff and clear escalation protocols in place.

**The core aim is simple but critical: to stabilise families before escalation occurs.**

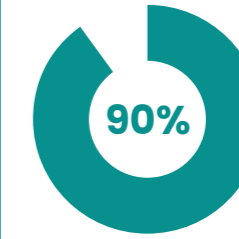
#### Measured Outcomes (n = 19)

Parents completed pre- and post-session evaluations, demonstrating clear shifts in emotional well-being and confidence.

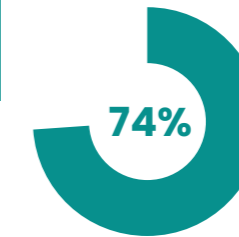
#### Reduced Emotional Overwhelm



**100%** of those entering highly overwhelmed reported improvement



**90%** reported feeling quite or very overwhelmed before attending



**74%** reported feeling manageable or calm after the session



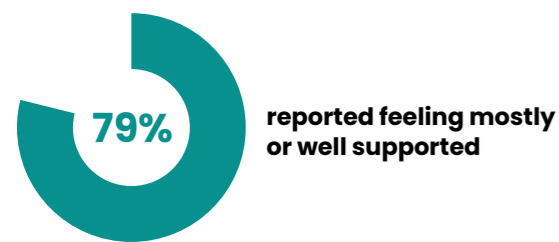
### Increased Confidence



### Parents described improved understanding of:

- Sensory needs
- Executive functioning
- Regulation
- Behaviour as communication

### Improved Perceived Support



Peer connection and shared lived experience were frequently described as transformative.

### Parent Voice

Parents consistently described a shift in how they felt and how they understood their child.

**"I came feeling very overwhelmed and left feeling calm."**

**"I don't feel alone anymore."**

**"I wish teachers in schools knew this information."**

**"It makes so much more sense now."**

Parents reported reduced isolation, greater clarity, and increased confidence in navigating education and support systems.

### Continued Support Pathway

Families are not discharged after attending the course. Instead, they are supported to continue their journey through STRM's wider offer.

This includes access to:

- Tea & Talk peer support sessions
- Themed workshops
- Benefits and household support guidance
- Ongoing advocacy and signposting
- STRM's *Supporting Your Neurodivergent Child* resource

Where financial pressure is identified, families may also be supported with:

- Benefits navigation
- Household support signposting
- Energy and food support referrals

By addressing both emotional well-being and complex systems, STRM reduces the compounding challenges associated with poverty and neurodivergence.

One parent reflected after attending the course, accessing the resource, and joining a Tea & Talk session:

**"Just knowing people have been through this and that we aren't going completely crazy really does help."**

### Strategic Alignment

This programme directly supports STRM's strategic priorities by:

- Enabling early identification and intervention
- Strengthening family resilience
- Reducing health inequalities
- Preventing escalation into statutory services
- Building community support

The courses operate as part of a coordinated support model that includes peer support, inclusive activities, wellbeing initiatives, and practical advice services.

Its low per-family cost and structured delivery model make it both effective and scalable.

### Why This Matters

This programme demonstrates that early, community-based intervention can deliver immediate and meaningful change.

By providing families with understanding, confidence, and connection at the right time, STRM helps reduce overwhelm, improve wellbeing, and prevent escalation while creating better outcomes for children, families, and services.

### 3.8 Financial Wellbeing Support Services

Throughout the year, we have expanded and refined our financial well-being support to better meet the needs of the families we support.

We provide practical, accessible support to help families understand and access the financial support they are entitled to.

This includes guidance on Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Carer's Allowance and Universal Credit. We support families in navigating complex application processes, understanding eligibility, and taking the next steps with confidence.



This has been strengthened through our Centre of Warmth project, alongside the development of our online membership zone. Families can now access step-by-step "how to get started" guides, templates and structured sentence banks to support them in completing applications more confidently and independently.

Our approach reduces stress and confusion, helping families to increase household income, improve financial stability and feel more in control.



### 3.9 Energy & Cost of Living Support

Throughout the year, we have strengthened our energy and cost-of-living support to respond to increasing demand from families facing financial pressure.

As part of our early intervention pathway, this support is introduced at registration and through targeted support, recognising that many families are not aware of the help available to them.

Through our role as a Centre of Warmth, we provide practical advice and support to help families stay safe, warm and financially secure.

This includes guidance on energy use and carbon monoxide safety, and support for accessing schemes such as the Priority Services Register (PSR) and the Warm Home Discount. We also provide direct support through the distribution of carbon monoxide alarms, slow cookers, and access to Household Support Fund vouchers, alongside energy-saving resources and targeted advice.

Alongside this, we help families understand their options, reduce energy costs and access the support available to them.

Our approach improves safety in the home, reduces financial pressure and increases confidence in managing energy needs.



### 3.10 Additional Practical Support

Throughout the year, we have continued to provide additional practical support to families experiencing immediate need.

This forms part of our targeted support offer, enabling us to respond flexibly to families facing financial pressure or specific challenges.

This includes access to supermarket vouchers, fuel bank vouchers, food support, hygiene items and essential household goods, helping families to meet day-to-day needs.

We have been kindly supported by the Southend Emergency Fund to provide supermarket vouchers for families in Southend. In addition, funding from EALC has enabled us to deliver our Family and Food Project for families across Essex, providing basic household items alongside sensory toys for children and young people.

We have significantly scaled this offer this year, increasing access to fuel bank vouchers, practical support, referrals and signposting, and expanding

opportunities for carer breaks, alongside stronger links with services such as food banks, Citizens Advice and community partners.

As a paid community partner with Carefree, we can refer eligible parent carers for short breaks. Through this scheme, carers can book 1–2-night hotel stays with a companion, with up to two breaks per year, using donated hotel capacity. This provides an opportunity for carers to rest and reset away from their caring role. STRM manages the referral, and families can then choose a break that works for them.

This offer is accessed through our early intervention pathway, recognising the importance of supporting parent carers' wellbeing alongside practical and financial support.

This approach helps families access support and opportunities they may not otherwise be aware of or feel able to consider, while also recognising the importance of parent carers taking time to rest and look after their own wellbeing.

### Case Study

A parent contacted STRM feeling overwhelmed by ongoing issues in her home, particularly concerns about mould and the impact this was having on her son's asthma. She had been trying to address the situation but felt she wasn't being heard and didn't know what steps to take next.

During a session, STRM supported her to access appropriate help and made a referral to the Green Doctor service.

Following this referral, a home visit was carried out. The practitioner took time to listen carefully to the family's experiences and fully understand the challenges they were facing. This validation was significant, as the parent had been struggling to have her concerns taken seriously.

As a direct result of the visit:

- The local council arranged for a surveyor to assess the property
- The mould treatment team was engaged and attended the home promptly
- Issues with loft insulation were identified, helping explain the ongoing problems

Alongside this, the family received practical support including:

- A shopping voucher to ease immediate financial pressure
- Energy-saving light bulbs and reflective radiator panels to improve efficiency
- A larger dehumidifier to help manage damp and mould

The parent shared that this support made a real and immediate difference, both practically and emotionally. For the first time, she felt listened to and supported, and that meaningful action was being taken.

**"It's made such a difference to feel heard and supported. I truly believe this is the start of improving our home environment for both my son and myself."**

This case highlights how early intervention, trusted relationships, and simple but targeted support can:

- Improve living conditions
- Support health and wellbeing
- Reduce stress and isolation
- Enable families to access systems that previously felt out of reach

STRM's role as a trusted, community-based organisation was key in bridging the gap between the family and the support available, ensuring they were not left to navigate this alone.

### 3.11 Community & Christmas Events

#### Christmas Bouldering party



Our Christmas Bouldering Party was a joyful celebration of everything our children and young people had achieved over the year. The session was filled with laughter, encouragement, and festive fun, creating a space where children could take part in their own way, at their own pace, and feel proud of themselves.



For many, this was not just a party. It was an opportunity to join in without pressure, to feel included and confident, and to celebrate progress, however big or small. Parents shared how special it was to see their children smiling, relaxed, and taking part in a way that truly worked for them.

We are incredibly grateful to Alan from The Art Ministry, Marcia from Arts Outburst, and Sarah from Love & Kisses Events for helping to make the session so special. A heartfelt thank you also goes to every family who came along and made it such a memorable celebration.



#### Christmas Carers' Events

Our Christmas Carers' Event gave SEND parent carers something they rarely get: time to pause, connect, and simply be. It was a warm and welcoming morning where carers could relax, enjoy food, talk openly, offload, and spend time in a room with people who truly understand their experiences.

The atmosphere in the room spoke for itself. Carers were smiling, connecting, and taking a moment for themselves, which was exactly what the day was intended to offer. For many, it was an opportunity to step away from the constant demands of caring, to feel seen and heard, and to be part of a supportive community.





This event was made possible through the incredible generosity and support of many individuals and organisations. We are especially grateful to Joan and Simon for organising the toy drive with Southend-on-Sea City Council, and to Chalkwell Park Rooms for hosting us and providing such a beautiful breakfast and welcoming venue. We would also like to thank Bella from Tropic Skincare for the relaxing hand massages, Sharon from Soroptimist International for the Reiki sessions, Sarah from Love & Kisses Events for bringing energy and fun with the photo booth, and Marcia from Arts Outburst for adding creativity to the day.

We are also thankful to Carers First Southend-on-Sea, particularly Mel and Yvonne, for their continued support, as well as Leigh on Sea Lions Club and Leigh on Sea Rotary, Essex, for their generosity. A huge thank you goes to our dedicated STRM team and volunteers, whose time, care, and commitment made the event possible.



We were honoured to welcome David Burton-Sampson MP and Cllr Jo McPherson, Mayor of Southend, whose presence helped recognise and highlight the importance of carers within our community.

Alongside our larger event, we also hosted a Relaxed Christmas Carers' Morning at Thundersley Methodist Church. This quieter, sensory-friendly session was designed for carers who benefit from a calmer environment, offering a gentle and welcoming space to connect with others. We were also pleased to welcome Cllr Kate Knott, Mayor of Castle Point, whose support further acknowledged the vital role of carers in our community.

The morning included hot drinks, festive treats, and relaxed conversation, creating an environment where carers could slow down, feel comfortable, and enjoy being part of a supportive community without feeling overwhelmed. For many, this was a rare opportunity to take a breath and simply be.

We are grateful to Carers First Essex for their continued support. As always, a heartfelt thank you goes to our incredible STRM volunteers, whose warmth and dedication make these moments possible.



### Why These Moments Matter

Across all of our Christmas events, one thing was clear: families do not just need support, they need spaces where they feel safe, understood, and connected. These moments of fun, rest, and belonging help to reduce isolation, support emotional well-being, and strengthen community. Most importantly, they remind families that they are not alone, and sometimes that makes all the difference.

### Neurospicy Tree

At our Christmas Carers' Event, families were invited to write a message of gratitude, reflection, or survival on a star or heart and place it on our Spicy Tree.

For many families of neurodivergent children, Christmas can be one of the most overwhelming and isolating times of the year. The Spicy Tree became a space to pause, reflect, and capture what support has meant — in their own words, in real time.



### What Families Said

Families shared honest, emotional reflections that speak for themselves:

"Keeping up my energy for the entire process."

"Always grateful for Send the Right Message and all the support."

"The support from Send the Right Message connecting with parents and carers who get it. Thank you."



"Being able to understand each other through my son's diagnosis and my own."

"I'm grateful for STRM."

"Coffee!!! Coffee!!! Coffee!!! Love!! Support!!!"

## What This Shows

The messages shared on the tree provide a powerful insight into the real impact of STRM's work.

Christmas is a particularly high-pressure time for SEND families. These reflections show that STRM provides stability, reassurance and emotional support when it is needed most.

Families are not just attending sessions – they are building meaningful relationships and finding connection. This is reflected in comments such as:

"Finding a community that gets it"

"Fabulous friends"

There is also clear evidence of improved emotional wellbeing. Families describe a shift from stress and survival towards resilience and hope, with reflections including:

"I have learned to be more positive about life"

"Survived another year!"

For some, this support represents a significant turning point. Parents shared increased confidence and independence, including:

"A massive turning point for me and my son"

"I've started my own business"

The impact on children and wider family life is also evident. Parents reported progress, improved understanding and stronger relationships, with feedback including:

"Since attending STRM sessions, I can really see the progression my child has made."

"We've found a community and a safe space where we feel understood."

## Reflections

The comments also highlight the very real and serious challenges that are facing. Statements like:

"Grateful my daughter lives to fight another day"

"Eternally grateful for Send the Right Message. Grateful my daughter lives to fight another day."

"What a very difficult and stressful year. I have learned to be more positive about life."

"At times when things have been really tough, we've had access to financial support through cost of living projects and Cadent through STRM."

demonstrate the critical role STRM plays in keeping families safe, supported and connected.

### 3.12 Supporting Your Neurodivergent Child Resource – National Reach

Our co-produced resource, Supporting Your Neurodivergent Child, continues to have a significant impact, supporting families and professionals both locally and nationally.

Across the year:

- distributed to families across Essex and beyond
- used by both families and professionals as a practical, accessible support tool
- reviewed and updated the Supporting Your Neurodivergent Child resource, ensuring it remains relevant, practical and easy to use
- strengthened its role as an early intervention resource, supporting families before, during and after diagnosis

**14+** Now used across 14 areas nationally

Herts	Suffolk
Bedfordshire	Norfolk
Luton	Somerset
Milton Keynes	Waltham Forest (NEL ICB)
Cambridgeshire	Sandwell (Black Country ICB)
Peterborough	Camden & Barnet (NCL ICB)
Greater Manchester	Solihull

**98%**

Parents feel more equipped

An overwhelming 98% of parents reported feeling more equipped to support and advocate for their neurodivergent child after utilising the resource, showcasing its significant impact on confidence.



**92%**

Prefer hard copy resources

An overwhelming 92% of families expressed a preference for hard copy resources, highlighting the importance of tangible materials for accessibility and effective support in navigating the SEND system.



**77%**

Families report reduced anxiety

This statistic highlights the significant impact of our resource, providing families with essential knowledge and support, ultimately leading to greater calm and understanding in their day-to-day lives.



## Recognition & Reach

The resource has now reached over 19,000 families and continues to be used across 14 areas nationally.

It was also recognised through the Children's Disabled Council National SEND Awards 2026, where it was shortlisted in the Partnership for the VCSE Sector category.

This recognition highlights the strength of co-produced, partnership-led work between families, professionals and the VCSE sector.

The resource continues to demonstrate the value of lived-experience-led, practical tools, helping families feel informed, confident, and better supported.

"This was the first thing that actually made sense."

### 3.13 Community Partnerships & Collaboration

We have strengthened our partnership approach this year to improve access to support and deliver more coordinated services for families. This includes establishing a new collaborative partnership with SAFE and MyOTAS, bringing together shared expertise, lived experience and delivery to enhance place-based support for neurodivergent families across Essex.

Alongside this, we have continued to build relationships with infrastructure networks such as CAVS, RRAVS and SAVS, local delivery partners including Indirock, as well as Citizens Advice and local food banks, and national charities such as Carefree and the Fuel Bank Foundation.

Through these strengthened partnerships, we have improved referral pathways, shared learning and increased opportunities for families to access timely and appropriate support.

With Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) underway, this collaborative approach is particularly important in ensuring a more consistent and joined-up offer for families during a period of transition.



Maggie STRM, Andrea SAFE & Paula Myotas.

### 3.14 Amplifying Lived Experience & Influencing Change

#### MP Engagement Event

Voices from the Front Line: Lived Experience Informing Change

STRM hosted a structured SEND Parent Carer Engagement Event to ensure that families lived experiences were heard directly by decision-makers. The event took place on Friday, 9th May 2025, at The Forum in Southend and was attended by David Burton-Sampson MP and Bayo Alaba MP. It was designed as a meaningful civic engagement opportunity, not only to listen to families but to present clear evidence, lived experience, and system insight in a structured and respectful way.



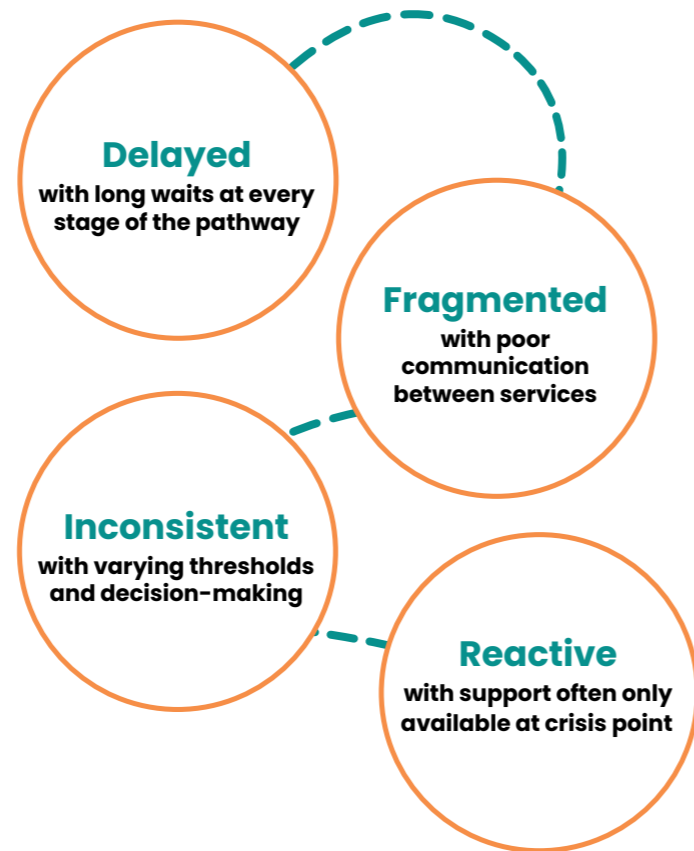
Parents and carers were recognised as experts by experience, in line with their rights under the Care Act 2014. Families contributed through a pre-event survey, attendance at the session, and three detailed parent testimonies shared directly with MPs. STRM ensured the session was accessible and supportive, providing advance visuals of the venue to reduce anxiety, a clear code of conduct to create a safe environment, and refreshments to support comfort and well-being.

Families shared powerful and often emotional accounts of navigating the SEND system. Many spoke about long waits for diagnosis and support, including experiences of waiting years for assessment, alongside children being left without appropriate education due to unmet needs. Parents described the experience as constant and all-consuming, highlighting the emotional, financial, and practical toll on family life. Many also spoke about the critical role of voluntary sector support, with some sharing that without organisations like STRM, they would not have coped.

Across the session, consistent themes emerged. Families described a system that is difficult to navigate, often leaving parents to coordinate support themselves, while experiencing repeated delays and a lack of clear communication between services. There was a strong sense that support is often provided only after situations have escalated significantly.

#### Key System Issues Identified

Families described a system that is:



Specific issues raised included:

- Children out of education due to unmet need
- Underdiagnosis of girls and those who mask
- Lack of recognition of parental neurodivergence
- Mental health risks, including references to suicidal thoughts
- Cycles of referral between services without resolution

#### Key Evidence and Statistics

The session combined lived experience with clear data:

- **100%** of attendees felt listened to
- **96%** said their story raised awareness
- **87%** learned more about how MPs can act
- **79%** felt more confident engaging with decision-makers

Additional national and local context shared by MP's included:

- Only **3.8%** of EHCPs were completed within statutory timeframes
- **90.4%** of EHCPs taking 6 months or longer
- Rising demand driven by improved awareness, not overdiagnosis

Both MPs engaged directly with families, listening carefully and responding to the issues raised. David Burton-Sampson MP acknowledged the scale of the challenges and the need for change, while Bayo Alaba MP reflected on the growing number of families raising SEND concerns and the importance of these conversations in shaping political understanding.

The event was described as empowering, emotional, and energising. Families left feeling heard, validated, and more confident in sharing their experiences with decision-makers.

This work goes beyond individual stories. It provides clear, collective insight into systemic challenges and reinforces the need for earlier, preventative intervention, clearer pathways, and better joined-up working across services.

STRM plays a critical role in creating these opportunities, acting as a bridge between families and decision-makers. By ensuring lived experience is captured, understood, and shared at the right level, STRM helps influence conversations that can lead to meaningful change.



#### Wider Influence and Parliamentary Engagement

This event is part of STRM's wider approach to influence and engagement.

On 10 June 2025, STRM was formally referenced by David Burton-Sampson, STRM during the first sitting of the Mental Health Bill in the House of Commons, ensuring parent carer voices were represented within national debate.

On 20 October 2025, STRM's CEO attended a SEND provision roundtable at Parliament hosted by Bayo Alaba, contributing lived experience insight into early years SEND reform discussions alongside sector partners and the Department for Education.

On 9 January 2026, STRM participated in the #SeeEveryNeed workshop with David Burton-Sampson and the Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board, exploring how SEND provision can be accessible earlier, embedded locally and more consistent across education, health and care.

On 27 March 2026, STRM's CEO attended the See Every Need discussion, hosted by David Burton-Sampson. The session brought together services, professionals and organisations to explore proposed SEND reforms and how support can be improved locally.

While the intention to ensure every child receives the right support at the right time was recognised, concerns were raised about how changes would be implemented in practice. In particular, families highlighted risks of potential reductions in legal rights, access to expertise, and the consistency of support.

STRM welcomed the opportunity to contribute to these discussions and will continue to advocate for families, ensuring their voices are represented within ongoing system and policy development.

### 3.15 Digital Development & CRM Upgrade

This year marked a significant step forward in strengthening STRM's digital infrastructure, ensuring our systems are fit for purpose as demand continues to grow.

We undertook a full review and upgrade of our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, transitioning to Lamplight CRM, a more robust and scalable platform. This has enabled us to move from fragmented data collection to a more structured, insight-driven approach.

As part of this transition, we made the strategic decision to temporarily pause new registrations and some support sessions. While challenging in the short term, this allowed us to rebuild our systems properly, ensuring they are safe, compliant, and capable of supporting long-term growth.

Key developments include:

- Improved data accuracy and consistency across all services
- Clearer tracking of attendances, interactions, and support delivered, strengthening our impact reporting
- Integration of referral pathways to better understand how families enter and move through our support offer
- Enhanced safeguarding and GDPR compliance, including clearer data handling processes
- More efficient communication with families through segmented mailing and updates via Mailchimp

We are now able to analyse our data in far greater depth, giving us a clearer picture of both need and demand across our community. Through our use of Lamplight CRM, we can identify which stage families are at in their journey – from early concerns and pre-diagnosis to navigating education, health, and care systems.

This includes understanding:

- The types of support families are accessing from statutory services
- Where gaps exist between what should be available and what is being experienced
- Patterns in presenting need, including financial hardship, emotional overwhelm, and system navigation challenges

This insight allows STRM to move beyond reactive support. We are now better positioned to:

- Anticipate need earlier and strengthen our early intervention pathway
- Evidence systemic gaps and inequalities within local provision
- Shape our services based on real-time community data
- Provide stronger, data-informed feedback to partners, commissioners and wider systems

Alongside CRM development, we have begun building the foundations of our Online Hub Membership, designed to provide families with:

- Access to peer support spaces
- Self-guided resources and tools
- Structured pathways aligned with our early intervention model

This digital infrastructure is critical to STRM's future. It enables us to:

- Scale our support sustainably
- Evidence our impact more effectively to funders and commissioners
- Strengthen referral pathways and partnership working
- Provide families with more consistent, accessible support

This insight allows STRM to move beyond reactive support. We are now better positioned to:

- Anticipate need earlier and strengthen our early intervention pathway
- Evidence systemic gaps and inequalities within local provision
- Shape our services based on real-time community data
- Provide stronger, data-informed feedback to partners, commissioners and wider systems

Looking ahead, we will continue to embed CRM use across all areas of delivery, with a focus on real-time data, improved reporting, and fully integrated referral systems that connect community support with statutory services.

We will also strengthen how conversations and interactions are recorded, ensuring clearer visibility of each family's journey. This supports the STRM team when families engage with multiple staff or volunteers, helping everyone stay informed and aligned. It will reduce duplication, enable more joined-up support, and ensure families do not have to repeatedly share their experiences.

### 3.16 Social Media Reach & Campaigns

Key Reach & Community Growth

- **311,719** social media views (+18% growth)
- **55,208** people reached
- **3,762** followers across platforms
- **2,184** online forum members
- **1,646** active forum members
- **119** posts shared in **28** days



### How We Use Each Platform

#### Facebook Community & Entry Point

Facebook remains STRM's primary community platform, acting as the front door for families. It can be where most parents first discover STRM, access updates, and engage with relatable, lived-experience content. It also supports local visibility and event promotion.

#### Instagram – Awareness & Engagement

Instagram is used to share accessible, visual content, including top tips, awareness campaigns, and bite-sized guidance. It performs particularly well for engagement, with photo-based content achieving +119% higher interaction.

#### LinkedIn – Professional Influence & Partnerships

LinkedIn supports STRM's strategic voice, sharing impact, insights, and system-level messaging. It strengthens relationships with commissioners, funders, and partners, and positions STRM within wider conversations around SEND, early intervention, and health inequalities.

#### Online Parent Forum – Deep Peer Support

STRM's online forum provides a safe, moderated space for sustained support, where families can ask questions, share experiences, and receive peer-led guidance.

- **2,184** members, with **1,646** actively engaging
- **513** reactions and **410** comments demonstrating strong peer interaction
- **64** membership requests within a 60-day period

This is where connection deepens, moving from information to ongoing support and belonging.



## Campaign Highlights

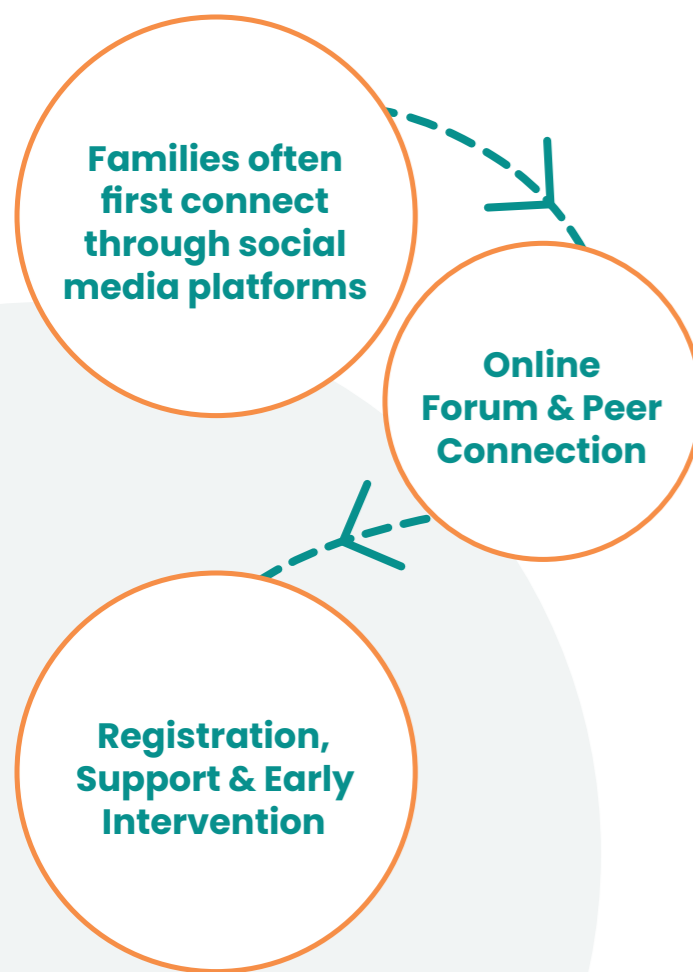
Across all platforms, STRM delivered targeted campaigns, including:

- ADHD & women's health awareness
- Carers information and financial support
- Neurodiversity Celebration Week
- Everyday regulation and parenting strategies
- Cadent safety and energy awareness

## Impact

This multi-platform approach enables STRM to:

- Reach families earlier and more effectively
- Provide clear, accessible information at scale
- Build trust and ongoing relationships
- Reduce isolation through peer connection
- Increase access to support, workshops, and financial guidance



STRM's digital platforms are not standalone tools; they are a connected system of early intervention, enabling us to reach, engage, and support families at every stage of their journey.

## 3.17 Impact Measurement & Evaluation

STRM is committed to understanding the difference our work makes and using this insight to continuously improve our services. We measure both what we deliver (outputs) and the changes experienced by families (outcomes) using a combination of structured data and lived experience feedback.

### How we measure impact

We collect data through:

- Our CRM system (Lamplight), where attendance, support provided, and engagement are recorded
- Session attendance across all programmes and activities
- Feedback forms and post-session surveys
- Informal conversations and ongoing engagement with families
- Online polls and feedback tools within our digital community

To ensure our approach is inclusive and accessible, we have also introduced creative feedback methods such as the "Neurospicy Tree", allowing families to share their experiences in a way that feels safe, visual and meaningful.

### What we measure

#### Outputs and what we deliver:

- Number of families supported
- Attendance across sessions, workshops and activities
- Online engagement and community reach
- Practical and financial support provided (including referrals, resources and guidance)

#### Outcomes and the difference we make:

- Increased confidence in understanding and supporting neurodivergent children
- Reduced isolation and improved peer connection
- Improved knowledge of available support, services and entitlements
- Increased ability to navigate education, health and care systems
- Improved financial stability through access to benefits and support
- Improved home stability through safer, warmer living environments

## Using our data

This data enables us to:

- Identify emerging needs within our community
- Adapt and strengthen our services in response to feedback
- Demonstrate impact to funders and partners
- Support earlier intervention and reduce escalation into crisis

### Before support

Many families came to STRM feeling overwhelmed and unsure where to start. Parents often described feeling isolated, with limited understanding of neurodivergence and little confidence in navigating education, health and care systems.

Children and young people were not always able to access activities that felt inclusive or suitable for their needs, which impacted confidence and participation.

At the same time, many families were experiencing financial pressure and challenges within the home, including housing and energy-related concerns.

## 3.18 Outcomes & Impact Summary

Across the reporting period, STRM has supported families at different stages of their journey from those seeking early guidance to those experiencing significant challenges. Our work has focused on reducing isolation, increasing understanding, and helping families access the right support earlier.

As a result, we have seen clear and consistent changes across parents, children and the wider community.

### After support

Following engagement with STRM, families report feeling more confident in understanding and supporting their child. Parents describe feeling less isolated, with stronger peer connections and a clearer understanding of the support available to them.

Families are better able to navigate systems, advocate for their child, and access the services and financial support they are entitled to. This has helped to reduce financial pressure and contributed to more stable and manageable home environments.



## Children and young people

Through inclusive activities such as our bouldering programme, children and young people have been able to take part in opportunities that feel accessible, supportive and enjoyable.

These experiences have helped to build confidence, improve social interaction and create a greater sense of belonging. For many, this has been an important step in feeling included and able to participate in their community.

## Community impact

STRM has created safe and welcoming spaces where families can connect, share experiences and support one another. Through peer sessions, workshops and community events, we have helped to reduce isolation and strengthen community connections.

These spaces also provide an accessible starting point for families who may not yet be ready to engage with more structured support.

## Wider impact

Together, these changes contribute to earlier intervention, helping to prevent challenges from escalating into crisis. Families feel more resilient, better supported and more able to manage the complexities of daily life.

Children and young people are more included, and parents are more informed, confident and empowered.

## 3.19 Referral Pathways & Navigation

Families access STRM through a range of pathways, with the majority currently self-referring through word of mouth, social media, community outreach, workshops, and peer recommendation. This reflects both the trust that families place in lived-experience-led support and the growing need for accessible, community-based early intervention.

Alongside self-referral, families are also signposted or referred through schools, health professionals, voluntary sector organisations, and community partners.

Families often approach STRM at very different stages of their journey. Some are seeking early guidance before diagnosis or formal support is in place, while others are navigating more complex challenges relating to education, emotional well-being, financial pressure, housing, or family stability.

Our approach is relationship-based and whole-family-focused rather than centred on one-off interventions. Families may initially attend or interact in a Tea & Talk session, workshop, activity, online forum, or practical support session before continuing through wider STRM pathways depending on their needs. Support may include peer connection, SEND navigation, financial well-being guidance, inclusive activities for children and young people, practical household support, and signposting or referral into specialist or statutory services where appropriate.

Many families continue accessing different parts of STRM's support over time, building trusted relationships and engaging in ways that feel manageable, flexible, and non-judgemental. This ongoing approach helps families feel less isolated, more informed, and more confident in understanding both their child's needs and the systems around them.

As STRM continues to strengthen its CRM systems and referral pathways, we are improving how we track family journeys, presenting needs, outcomes, and patterns of support. This will support earlier identification of need, stronger partnership working, and more joined-up responses across community and statutory services.

## 3.20 STRM Whole-Family Support Model

Families of neurodivergent and disabled children often face long waits and unclear pathways to support. Many seek help before there is a diagnosis, plan or professional involvement in place, while stress, isolation and financial pressures continue to escalate.

STRM exists to bridge this gap. As a lived experience-led organisation, we provide early, accessible, whole-family support at the point families need it most – not when they meet a threshold.

Our approach is rooted in lived experience, enabling us to provide support that is relatable, credible and grounded in a genuine understanding of the challenges families face. This helps us build trust quickly and develop strong, authentic relationships from the outset.

Through peer support, practical guidance and community-based activities, we help families build understanding, confidence and connection. We bring families together, creating spaces where they can feel less alone, grow in confidence, and find their people within a supportive community.

Our support extends beyond peer connection. We provide guidance on financial wellbeing, raise awareness of neurodivergence and SEND, advocate for families navigating complex systems, and deliver inclusive activities that support the whole family.

Our approach reduces isolation, strengthens family resilience, and supports parents to navigate systems with greater clarity and confidence.

By working alongside statutory services, we complement existing provision and contribute to a more joined-up pathway of support. This ensures families are better prepared, better informed, and less likely to reach crisis point.

We deliver targeted support across Castle Point, Rochford and Southend, alongside open-access support available to families across Essex.



**This approach is reflected in our reach, with over 2,500 families supported, more than 1,300 registered members, and thousands of community interactions delivered across Essex.**

## 3.21 Our Projects

### Cadent Project – Keeping Families Safe, Warm and Supported

Families of neurodivergent and disabled children are often navigating high levels of stress, rising costs, and complex systems, all while trying to keep their homes safe and stable.

Through our partnership with Cadent & Sava, we've been able to offer practical, accessible support that meets families where they are, whether that's through a conversation at a session, a leaflet shared at the right moment, or direct help accessing schemes and safety measures.

This work sits alongside our wider early intervention model helping to prevent crisis, reduce risk, and build confidence in managing day-to-day life.

### Our Impact This Year

#### Cadent support interactions

Including:

- **723** carbon monoxide (CO) safety conversations
- **972** CO safety leaflets distributed (including additional outreach at community events)
- **76** carbon monoxide alarms provided
- **595** conversations around efficient use of appliances
- **579** conversations supporting families with condensation and damp
- **511** Priority Services Register (PSR) 1-to-1 conversations
- **163** PSR sign-ups completed
- **895** PSR leaflets shared

### Supporting Families Financially

Alongside energy and safety advice, we supported families to access essential financial help:

- **418** Disability Living Allowance (DLA) interactions
- **361** Carers Allowance interactions
- **352** Personal Independence Payment (PIP) interactions
- **172** Warm Homes Discount interactions
- **164** Universal Credit interactions

We know that for many families, understanding what they are entitled to – and how to access it – can be overwhelming. This support helps families feel more confident navigating systems and reduces financial pressure at critical points.

## Practical Support That Makes a Difference

We know that small, practical support can have a big impact on daily life.

This year, we provided:

- **61** slow cookers, helping families reduce energy costs and access simple, low-effort meal options
- Cookbooks and resources distributed across multiple community events, supporting families to cook together, build confidence, and create shared routines

Additional distribution included:

- **22** cookbooks during Gas Safety Week
- **28** cookbooks distributed through community events

These resources are already encouraging family connection, independence, and healthier routines.

## Community Outreach and Engagement

We continued to meet families in their communities, not just in sessions.

This included:

- Attending a community event in Canvey Island, where we distributed additional safety and support leaflets
- Delivering outreach through schools and local partnerships, including new connections such as Bournemouth Park School
- Running community events to widen reach, build trust, and increase awareness of available support

## Strengthening Our Systems and Reach

This year also marked a significant period of growth and development for STRM.

We undertook a comprehensive governance review to ensure our organisational structures remain robust and fit for purpose. In parallel, we implemented a new CRM system to streamline data management, enhance communication, and improve the efficiency of our service delivery.

To facilitate this transition, we made the decision to temporarily pause new registrations and some support sessions. This short-term step allows us to scale our impact more effectively in the long term.

At the same time, we:

- Developed our Online Membership Zone, providing access to peer support spaces, self-guided resources, and interactive content
- Introduced new ways for families to self-refer and access support in a way that feels manageable and accessible
- Despite this pause, our community of over **1,300** registered families continued to benefit from:
  - Regular updates, events, and activities
  - Access to tools including the DLA Sentence Bank and step-by-step guides
  - Ongoing communication via newsletters, social media, and WhatsApp

### Digital Growth and Accessibility

As our Membership Zone expanded, engagement continued to grow:

- **1,493** page views in May (up 37%)

Families are increasingly accessing support online, particularly those who:

- cannot attend in person
- need flexible, low-pressure ways to engage
- prefer to build confidence before reaching out

We also introduced a dedicated Carers section, including:

- Priority Services Register (PSR) information
- Cadent resources and safety videos
- Energy and household support guidance

We continue to expand this area with content covering:

- Carbon monoxide safety
- Efficient use of appliances
- Condensation and damp
- Warm Homes Discount
- Services Beyond the Meter
- Green Doctors

### Campaigns and Awareness

During Gas Safety Week, we delivered a focused campaign:

- Reached **1,312** registered members
- Achieved **1,881** Facebook views
- Shared daily safety messages

The campaign was amplified by:

- Castle Point & Rochford Wellbeing Board
- Southend Local Offer
- RRAVS

In addition:

- Our slow cooker campaign reached 1,185 Facebook views
- We delivered 13 targeted social media campaigns across the year

These campaigns extend our reach beyond sessions, ensuring families can access support when and how they need it.

### 3.22 Cost of Living Support

#### Practical Help When It Matters Most

Through our partnership with Cadent and the Centre of Warmth, we supported families facing financial pressure.

We provided:

- Energy advice
- Fuel and food support
- Help accessing funding
- Benefits guidance

This support reduces stress and helps families stay stable during difficult times.



### 3.23 Volunteers, Workforce & Trustee Board

STRM is powered by a small, dedicated workforce, supported by a committed team of volunteers and an experienced Trustee Board. As a lived experience-led organisation, many of our team, including trustees, bring personal insight into neurodivergence and caring roles. This strengthens the empathy, understanding and trust that underpin all of our work with families.

Our workforce model is intentionally lean, flexible and community based. Staff and volunteers work across delivery, outreach and operations to ensure families receive timely, consistent and responsive support.

Volunteers are central to STRM's delivery. They help create welcoming, inclusive environments at sessions, support activities such as inclusive bouldering, assist with administration, and provide peer connection to families who may be feeling isolated. Their contribution enables us to extend our reach while maintaining a strong sense of community.

Our Trustee Board provides strategic leadership, governance oversight and accountability. Trustees bring a range of professional expertise, including HR, safeguarding, finance, and lived experience of SEND. The Board meets regularly to review performance, oversee risk, ensure compliance with Charity Commission guidance, and support the long-term sustainability of the organisation. Trustees also contribute to key areas such as policy development, safer recruitment oversight, and organisational strategy.

We are committed to safe, high-quality and trauma-aware practice. All staff and volunteers follow safer recruitment processes, including DBS and Right to Work checks where appropriate. Induction includes safeguarding, GDPR, and role-specific training, with ongoing opportunities to build knowledge and confidence. Governance oversight is strengthened through trustee involvement, including designated leads for safeguarding and HR.

As a trauma-aware organisation, we recognise the emotional impact of both lived experience and frontline support roles. Many of our team members balance caring responsibilities alongside their work and may themselves have experienced complex or overwhelming systems. We therefore prioritise a culture of understanding, flexibility and psychological safety. This includes encouraging open communication, reflective practice, and peer support within the team, as well as clear boundaries and regular check-ins.

As STRM continues to grow, we are strengthening our workforce and governance infrastructure. This includes developing a structured Volunteer Handbook, clearer role pathways, and enhanced systems for onboarding, supervision and recognition. Alongside this, we are continuing to strengthen Board diversity, skills and lived experience to ensure STRM remains well-governed, sustainable and responsive to the communities we serve.



## FINANCE

### 4.1 Treasurer's Report – Overview Finance Report presented by Brian Beggs, Vice Chair, by proxy on behalf of the Trustee Board

STRM has continued to grow over the reporting period, with increased income supporting the expansion of services and support for families of neurodivergent and disabled children across South Essex and wider Essex.

The charity remains financially stable, with positive cash flow and no immediate short-term concerns. However, as a small, parent-led organisation without statutory funding, STRM continues to operate with limited unrestricted reserves and a reliance on restricted funding.

Strengthening financial sustainability remains a key priority as demand for services continues to increase.

### 4.2 Opening Position

This report covers the standard 12-month financial year.

STRM entered the reporting period in a stable financial position and has continued to build on this through careful financial management, strong grant income, and controlled expenditure.

### 4.3 Statement of Activities

- Total income: **£109,497**
- Total expenditure: **£75,623**
- Net operating surplus: **£33,874**

STRM has maintained a positive financial position, with income exceeding expenditure during the reporting period. This surplus reflects successful grant funding and careful management of resources.

### 4.4 Income Overview – Key Funders

STRM's income is primarily generated through grant funding, alongside community fundraising and donations.

During the reporting period, the charity was supported by a range of funders, including:

- Southend City Council Short Breaks Fund
- Southend Emergency Fund
- Castle Point Council
- ASDA Foundation
- Active Southend
- People's Postcode Lottery
- Rosca Trust
- Southend Community Investment Board
- Rochford District Council
- Geoff Greenfield Ltd
- National Lottery Awards for All
- Cadent & SAVS – Centre for Warmth Project
- Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC)
- Essex Community Foundation
- Active Essex
- Norman Garon Trust

Their contributions enabled the delivery of early intervention support, peer support sessions, and community-based activities.

Additional funding has been secured through smaller grants, community fundraising, and donations, which continue to play an important role in supporting the charity's work.

### 4.5 Expenditure Summary

Expenditure during the reporting period has focused on providing support to families of neurodivergent and disabled children.

This includes:

- Delivery of peer support sessions, workshops, and community-based activities
- Staffing to meet increasing demand and expand delivery
- Direct financial support to families, including the Household Support Fund
- Operational and infrastructure costs, including rent, insurance, IT systems, HR infrastructure, and office expenses
- Governance, safeguarding, health and safety, and compliance
- Training and development for staff and volunteers
- Volunteer expenses
- Memberships, marketing, printing, and communications
- Accountancy and financial management

Expenditure has increased in line with growth, particularly in staffing, training, and infrastructure. This reflects expansion of the team, investment in HR systems, and increased employer costs.

In line with wider sector trends, increases in National Insurance contributions, alongside changes to employment legislation and employer obligations, have also directly impacted the operating costs of small charities.

Spending remains controlled and aligned with delivery, ensuring resources are used effectively.

### 4.6 Restricted & Unrestricted Funds

A large proportion of STRM's income is restricted to specific projects and activities in line with funder requirements.

Unrestricted income supports core costs, including staffing, governance and infrastructure and remains comparatively limited. Increasing unrestricted income and continuing to build organisational reserves remain important to strengthen long-term sustainability, resilience and organisational flexibility.

The charity operates separate bank accounts for:

- day-to-day operations,
- payroll and staffing costs, and
- organisational reserves.

During this financial year, trustees formally approved and minuted the ringfencing of payroll funds. The balance held for payroll commitments is therefore shown as a designated fund rather than as general unrestricted reserves, reflecting the trustees' intention that these funds be set aside specifically for salaries, payroll obligations, and reserve protection.

### 4.7 Closing Balance

At the end of the reporting period, STRM held total net assets of **£148,477**.

Cash balances were held across three bank accounts to support reserves management, payroll commitments and day-to-day operational delivery.

The charity maintains separate accounts to support clear financial management, including separation between reserves, payroll and operational funds.

Not all funds are available for general use, as a proportion is restricted, designated or committed to specific projects and staffing obligations.

The charity continues to review its banking arrangements to ensure value for money.

### 4.8 Reserves & Sustainability

Unrestricted reserves are currently held at approximately **£14,414**, providing limited coverage of core operating costs and organisational contingency. Trustees recognise that this level of unrestricted reserves remains below the level required to support longer-term financial resilience and sustainability. However, this represents continued progress from the previous reporting period, reflecting STRM's ongoing focus on strengthening organisational stability and financial resilience.

A significant proportion of the charity's overall funds are restricted, designated or committed to specific projects and staffing obligations and are therefore not available for general operational use.

A substantial proportion of the charity's operational infrastructure, systems, and setup costs has now been established, helping strengthen operational capacity and reduce future setup expenditure, although ongoing investment in equipment, infrastructure, and service development will remain required as STRM grows.

Increasing unrestricted income and strengthening unrestricted reserves remain key strategic priorities for the year ahead. This includes a focused approach to fundraising, corporate partnerships, and diversifying income streams to support core operational costs, organisational resilience, and future reserve growth.



## 4.9 Financial Commentary

STRM has continued to expand its reach and services in response to increasing demand from families across Essex.

Growth has been supported by grant funding, fundraising, and community backing, enabling the charity to expand its delivery whilst maintaining accessibility and quality.

The charity remains committed to careful financial management and developing a more sustainable and diverse income model over the coming years.

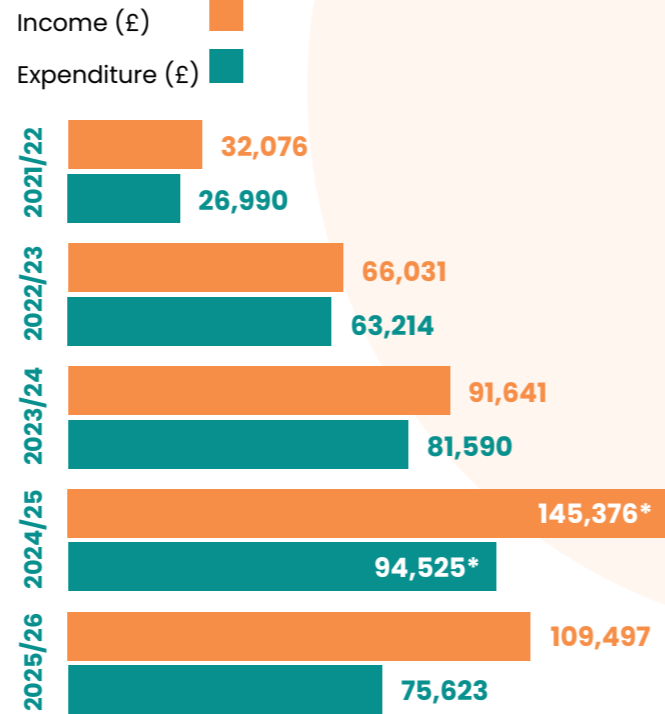
### 4.10 Summary

STRM remains financially stable, with continued growth in income, delivery and organisational infrastructure.

Strengthening unrestricted income and long-term sustainability will remain key priorities.

## FINANCIAL SUMMARY & HIGHLIGHTS

### 5.1 Income & Expenditure Growth

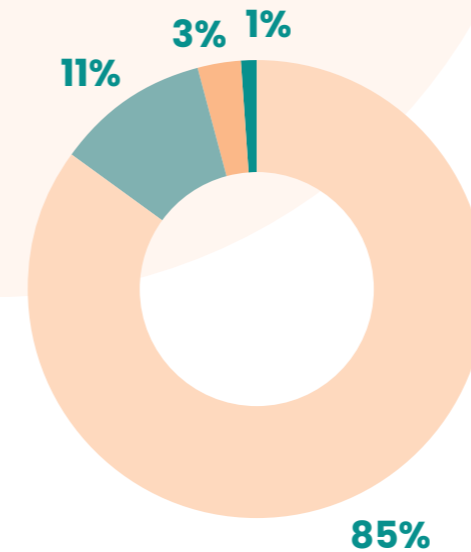
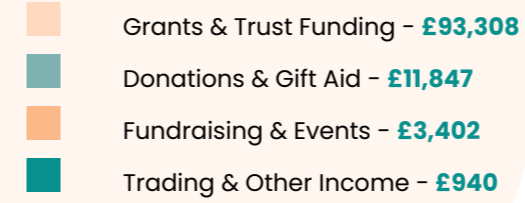


\*2024/25 covered a 13-month reporting period following the charity's year-end adjustment and is therefore not directly comparable.

## 5.2 Income Breakdown

STRM's income is derived from a mix of grant funding, community fundraising and donations.

This mix enables both targeted project delivery and broader support for families, although a significant proportion of funding remains linked to specific activities.



## 5.3 Financial Highlights 2025/26

### Income

- **£109,497** total income received across charitable and community programmes

### Investment in Delivery

- **£75,623** invested into charitable activities, staffing, community support and operational delivery
- Continued investment in safeguarding, governance, systems and organisational infrastructure

### Reserves & Sustainability

- **£15,249** raised through donations and fundraising, helping STRM cover essential operational costs for **2026/27**, organisational infrastructure and frontline family support
- Unrestricted reserves increased from approximately **£6,000** to over **£14,000** during the year
- Trustees designated **£66,537** towards future salary and payroll commitments for **2026/27** to support organisational stability
- As a relatively new grassroots charity, maintaining appropriate unrestricted reserves is important to support sustainability, staffing stability and continuity of frontline support for families.
- Trustees recognise the positive progress made in strengthening reserves and improving financial resilience during the year and maintained careful financial management whilst strengthening long-term sustainability and resilience.

### Looking Ahead

STRM will continue growing unrestricted income, donations, fundraising and corporate support during 2026/27 to help cover core operational costs and frontline family support

## 5.4 Independent Examiner's Report and Financial Statements

The charity's independently examined accounts and financial statements are included within this report and provide a detailed overview of STRM's financial position.

The independent examination has been carried out by Count On Us CIC.

[Annual Accounts 25/26](#)



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### 6.1 Delivery Sites & Community Spaces

We are incredibly grateful to the community venues and spaces that have enabled STRM to deliver support where families need it most.

Across the year, our work has been hosted in welcoming, accessible environments across Castle Point, Rochford, Southend-on-Sea and Benfleet, including:

- STRM HQ, Benfleet
- Indirock, Southend (Inclusive Bouldering)
- The Hang Out Venue Ltd
- Rochford WI Hall
- Shoebury Youth & Community Centre



These spaces have made it possible for families to access:

- peer support sessions
- early intervention workshops
- inclusive activities such as bouldering
- community-led events and outreach

By opening their doors to STRM, these venues have helped create safe, trusted spaces where families feel understood, supported, and less alone.

### 6.2 Corporate & Local Business Supporters

#### Our Supporters and Funders

We are incredibly grateful to the organisations, businesses, community partners and individuals who have supported STRM throughout this reporting period. Their support has helped us continue delivering early intervention, peer support, practical guidance and inclusive community-based activities for families across Essex.

### Funders & Grant Supporters

We would like to sincerely thank the following organisations for their funding and grant support during this reporting period:

Their support has enabled STRM to strengthen early intervention, practical family support, financial wellbeing guidance, inclusive activities, and community outreach across our areas.

### Delivery Partners & Community Support

We would also like to thank the organisations and community partners who have worked alongside STRM to help families access support, activities and trusted community spaces.

This includes community venues, delivery partners, voluntary sector organisations, schools, and wider networks who continue to support collaboration, outreach and accessible local provision.

### Local Business Supporters

We are grateful to the local businesses who have supported STRM through donations, professional services, fundraising support, discounted services and practical contributions throughout the year:

- Simms Milling Services Ltd
- Osmond's
- GC Valeting
- Quattro Group
- IT Help Desk
- Northsouth Design & Marketing Ltd
- Count On Us CIC
- River Leigh HR Consulting

We would also like to thank CFC for supporting STRM with PAT testing, helping us maintain safe and compliant environments for families.



### Community Supporters & Donors

Finally, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the individual donors, volunteers, fundraisers and community supporters who have contributed through events, campaigns, donations and acts of kindness across the year.

Whether through fundraising, volunteering time, donating goods, sharing resources or helping families feel welcome and supported, every contribution has helped strengthen STRM's community and reach more families when support was needed most.

### 6.3 Volunteer Highlights & Community Supporters

Our volunteers and community supporters are at the heart of STRM.

Throughout the year, volunteers have supported delivery, created welcoming spaces, and helped families feel understood and connected. Alongside this, our community has stepped forward to raise vital funds in both one-off and ongoing ways.

### Community Fundraising Events

Thank you to everyone who organised and supported community-led fundraising events, including:

- Curry Night fundraiser – raising **£257.86**
- Table Top Sale – raising **£293**
- London Run challenge – raising **£2,340**
- Southend Halloween Parade – raising **£95.64**

These events brought people together, raised awareness locally, and generated vital funds to support STRM services.

**A huge thank you to Andy, Vicki, Danielle and Bella for your amazing fundraising efforts and ongoing support for STRM. A special thank you to Caroline for your monthly donation and continued support.**



### Individual & Community Giving

We are incredibly grateful to those who supported STRM through personal and community-led fundraising:

- Facebook birthday fundraisers – raising **£317.71**

By using personal celebrations and networks to give back, supporters helped extend our reach and impact.

**Thank you to Vicky, Ann, Kirstie, Kerry, Sue, Nikki, Stan, Stephen, Travis, Simon, Arijadna, Kathy, Siân, Channy, David, Caroleanne, Char-Lou and Vicky for your fundraising and donations in support of STRM**

### Everyday & Regular Giving

We would like to thank those who support STRM through ongoing and everyday contributions:

- Easyfundraising supporters – raising **£235.68** through online shopping
- Monthly donors – providing vital, consistent income that helps sustain our services

These contributions play a key role in ensuring we can continue to deliver support consistently and plan for the future.

### One-Off Donations

We are also incredibly grateful to individuals and businesses who have made one-off donations to STRM.

These contributions, whether large or small, have helped us respond flexibly to the needs of families and continue delivering timely support where it is needed most.

### Fundraising Impact

Across all fundraising activities this year, a total of **£3,402** was raised to support STRM's work with families.

Every pound raised whether through events, personal fundraising, one-off donations, or everyday giving has directly supported families in accessing the help they need, when they need it most.

## Volunteer Impact

During this reporting period, STRM was supported by approximately 12 volunteers in regular roles, alongside an active trustee board, all of whom played a central role in supporting delivery, governance, fundraising, and community outreach across the organisation.

Volunteer and trustee contribution across the year included delivery support, governance oversight, preparation, fundraising, administration, partnership working, communications, supervision, and wider unpaid community support. While not all activity is formally tracked, the true contribution may realistically approach or exceed 1,000 hours across the year.

Combined volunteer and trustee contribution represented a substantial additional workforce contribution across the year.

Volunteers and trustees have played a vital role in:

- creating safe, welcoming and non-judgemental spaces for families
- supporting peer-led sessions and activities
- helping deliver community events and fundraising initiatives
- strengthening connection and reducing isolation
- supporting governance, strategic oversight, and organisational development
- helping families access practical guidance, signposting, and early intervention support

Many of our volunteers and trustees bring lived experience as parents, carers, or neurodivergent individuals themselves, helping families feel understood, represented, and less alone.

Their time, care, expertise, and commitment remain central to STRM's ability to deliver responsive, community-led support.



## 6.4 Volunteer Highlight: Michelle

Michelle has played an important role in supporting STRM's Eating & Neurodivergence work, helping to raise awareness and create safe, understanding spaces for families navigating complex relationships with food.



Through her involvement, Michelle has supported:

- delivery of Eating & Neurodivergence sessions
- raising awareness of eating differences and eating disorders within neurodivergent children and young people
- creating a calm, non-judgemental environment where families feel able to share experiences
- helping families feel heard, understood and less alone

Michelle brings empathy, sensitivity and a thoughtful approach to this work, recognising the challenges many families face around food, anxiety and sensory needs.

Her contribution has supported STRM's wider aim of increasing understanding of eating differences, ARFID, and the intersection between neurodivergence and eating behaviours, helping to break stigma and encourage earlier support.

### Volunteer Reflection

"Being part of the Eating & Neurodivergence sessions has shown me how many families are navigating this quietly and often without support. Creating a space where people feel safe to talk, be understood and not judged is incredibly important. I'm proud to be part of something that helps families feel less alone."



We are incredibly grateful for Michelle's commitment to this area of work and the difference she makes to families.

## 6.5 Legacy Giving & Community Recognition

We are proud to be part of a growing community movement that values lived experience, peer support, and early intervention.

This year, STRM has been recognised through:

- national award nominations
- growing partnerships across health, education and the voluntary sector
- increasing demand for our resources, including Supporting Your Neurodivergent Child

We also recognise the importance of community generosity and legacy giving, which helps ensure that our work can continue to grow sustainably and reach future families.

## 6.6 Fundraising Hero: Andy & Family

We are incredibly grateful to Andy and his family for their inspiring fundraising efforts in support of STRM.

Having never taken on a challenge like this before, Andy set out to raise both awareness and funds, combining his passion for running with a deeply personal mission to support families navigating eating disorders and neurodivergence.

Through completing the LDNX 10K London Run on 24 August 2025, Andy raised over £2,340, reaching 234% of his original fundraising target and bringing together 44 supporters – a testament to the strength of his story and the community behind him.



## Their Story

Andy and Michelle's journey began when their son struggled with eating from a very early age, showing strong sensory sensitivities and little interest in food.

In 2023, he was diagnosed with Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID), a complex and often misunderstood eating disorder.

Following illness and medical procedures, his relationship with food became increasingly limited, at one stage reducing his intake to just yoghurt and later only whole milk.

Like many families, they faced significant challenges accessing the right support, including gaps in services and being told that no help was available.

## Turning Experience into Action

Rather than facing this journey alone, Andy and Michelle chose to use their experience to help others.

- Michelle has actively raised awareness of ARFID through media, campaigns such as #dumpthescales, and her volunteering with STRM
- Andy has taken on a running challenge, using it as a platform to raise funds and awareness for families facing similar challenges
- Together, they are helping ensure other families feel less alone and better supported

## Why This Matters

Their fundraising is about more than money – it is about:

- raising awareness of ARFID and eating differences
- ensuring families can access support earlier
- helping STRM continue delivering community-led support and guidance

Andy shared:



**"I would hate for other children and parents to go through what we do. Helping this charity means other families can get the help and advice we never had."**

## Our Thanks

We are incredibly thankful to Andy, Michelle and their supporters for their honesty, courage and commitment.

Their efforts are making a real difference, helping STRM reach more families, raise awareness, and continue building a community where no one feels alone.

## 6.7 Ethical Fundraising & Transparency Statement

STRM is committed to fundraising in a way that is ethical, transparent and respectful.

We follow recognised UK fundraising standards, including the principles set out by the Fundraising Regulator and the Code of Fundraising Practice.

We ensure that:

- all funds are used to directly support our charitable objectives
- families are never pressured or obligated to contribute financially
- our fundraising is honest, open and does not mislead
- donations and grants are clearly recorded, accounted for and reported
- supporters' data is handled in line with UK GDPR and data protection requirements
- we take particular care when engaging with vulnerable individuals and families
- partnerships and funding sources align with our values and community-led approach

As a small, parent-led charity, trust is central to everything we do.

We remain committed to openness, accountability, and ensuring that every contribution makes a meaningful impact.

## Thank YOU

To every family, volunteer, partner and supporter – thank you for standing alongside STRM.

Behind every session, every conversation and every resource are real families navigating complex journeys. Your support makes it possible for those families to feel seen, heard and supported at the right time.

Together, we are creating something that goes beyond services – a community rooted in understanding, connection and real change.



## LOOKING AHEAD 2026/27

### 7.1 Strengthening Foundations, Expanding Reach, Transforming Support

As STRM moves into the next phase of its journey, our focus is on strengthening the foundations we have built, expanding our reach, and continuing to shape a system that better understands and supports neurodivergent children, young people and their families.

Over the coming year, we will build on the progress made during this reporting period – expanding early intervention, deepening peer-led support, and ensuring families can access help earlier, with greater clarity and confidence. This reflects our continued commitment to reducing escalation and supporting families before challenges reach crisis point.

A key development for the year ahead is our collaborative partnership with SAFE and MyOTAS, bringing together shared expertise to strengthen coordinated, place-based support across Essex.

Through this partnership, we will:

- strengthen collaboration across organisations
- improve access to timely and appropriate support
- support shared learning and co-delivery of services
- promote a more joined-up and consistent experience for families

This approach complements existing statutory and community provision, while maintaining clear governance, safeguarding responsibilities and organisational independence.

We will also continue to engage proactively with wider system change, including Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), ensuring that the voices and experiences of families remain visible and influential as local structures evolve.

At a national level, STRM will continue to influence and inform the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan (SEND White Paper), drawing on lived experience and frontline insight to contribute to more effective and inclusive systems.

We are also delighted to have been selected as a Mayor's Charity in Southend and Castle Point, providing further opportunity to raise awareness, strengthen community connections, and extend our reach to more families.

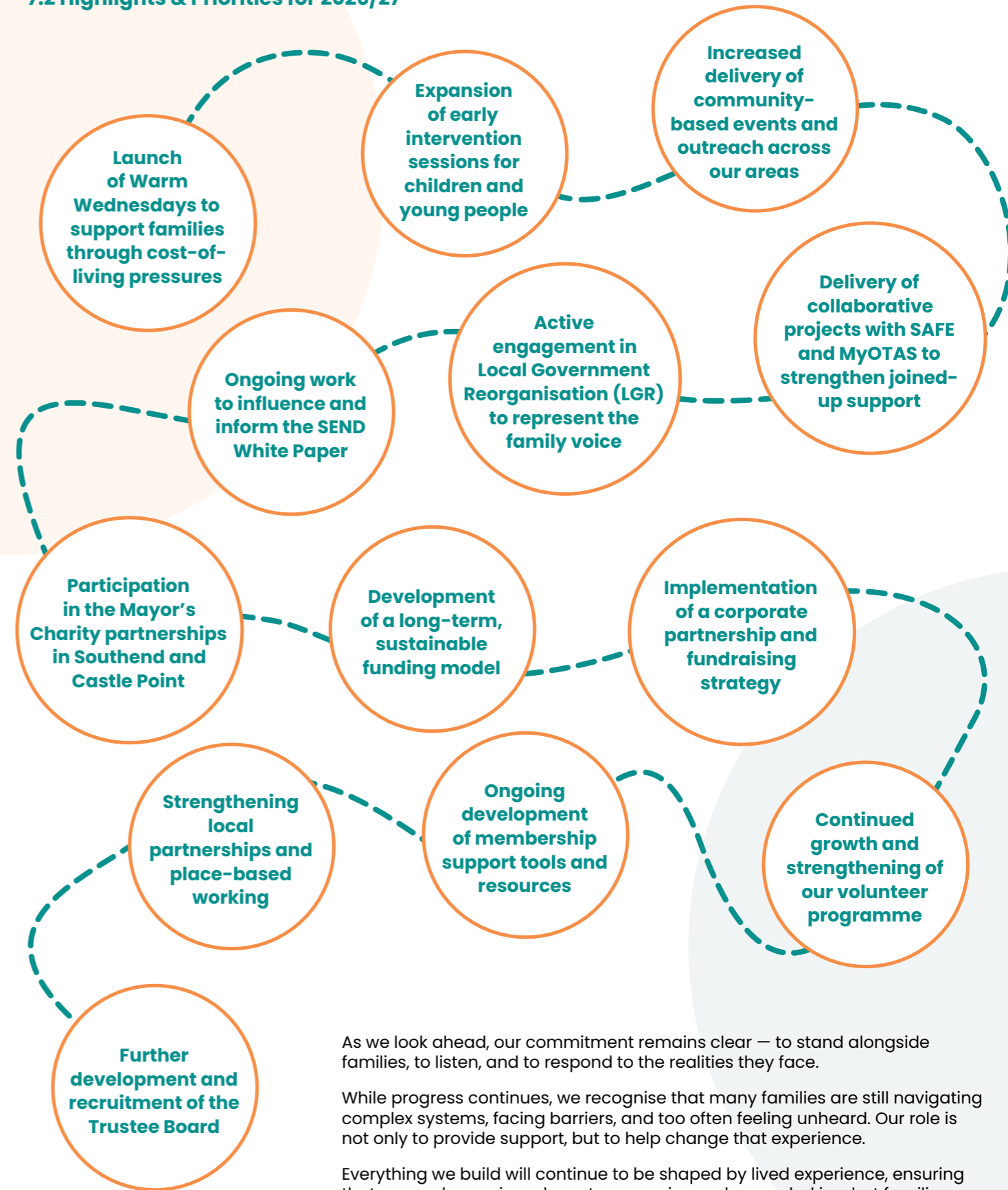
Our work will continue to be rooted in lived experience, community connection and practical support. We remain committed to equipping families with the tools, knowledge and confidence they need to navigate systems and advocate for their children.

Alongside service delivery, we will continue to strengthen STRM as an organisation, developing sustainable funding pathways, growing our volunteer workforce, and further developing and recruiting a skilled and diverse Trustee Board to ensure strong governance, oversight and long-term sustainability.

STRM remains committed not only to delivering support, but to contributing to a more inclusive, informed and compassionate system for families across our communities.



### 7.2 Highlights & Priorities for 2026/27



As we look ahead, our commitment remains clear – to stand alongside families, to listen, and to respond to the realities they face.

While progress continues, we recognise that many families are still navigating complex systems, facing barriers, and too often feeling unheard. Our role is not only to provide support, but to help change that experience.

Everything we build will continue to be shaped by lived experience, ensuring that our work remains relevant, responsive and grounded in what families need most.

Together, with our partners, volunteers and wider community, we will continue to grow STRM in a way that is inclusive, sustainable and rooted in compassion, ensuring that families feel supported, understood and not alone.



**STRM - SEND the Right Message**  
Registered Charity 1193572

SEND the Right Message Charity (STRM)  
Registered Charity No. 1193572  
320D High Road  
Benfleet  
Essex  
SS7 5HB

Tel: 07359 068 827  
Email: [info@strmsupport.co.uk](mailto:info@strmsupport.co.uk)  
[www.strmsupport.co.uk](http://www.strmsupport.co.uk)

 [www.facebook.com/sendtherightmessagecharity](http://www.facebook.com/sendtherightmessagecharity)

 [www.instagram.com/send\\_the\\_right\\_message](http://www.instagram.com/send_the_right_message)

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