

Evaluation Group Blog

REFLECTING, LEARNING, IMPROVING

Find out more about some of the things our Evaluation Team has been working on below or find out more about our evaluation team [here](#).

> [February 2026](#)

> [January 2026](#)



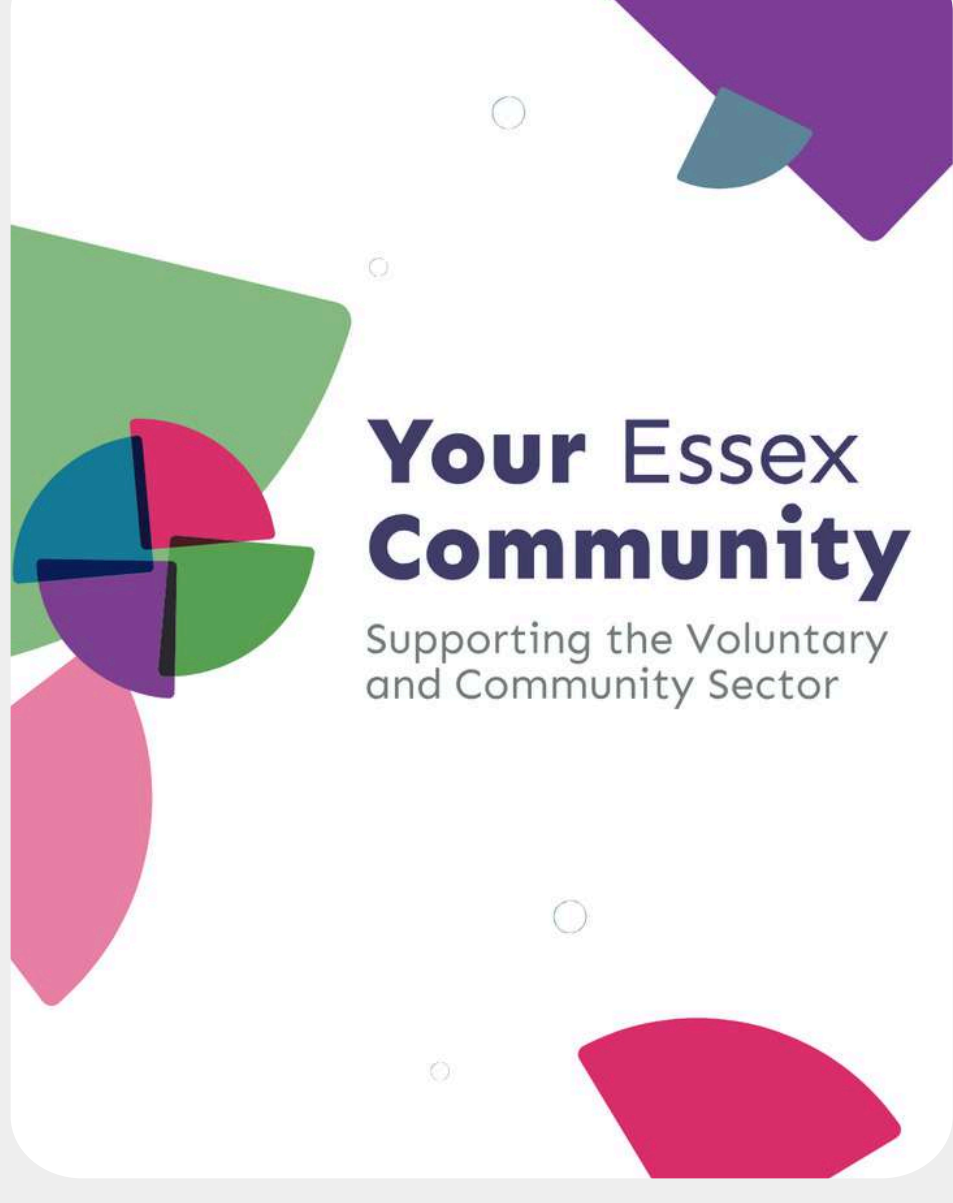
February 26

HOW TO DEMONSTRATE IMPACT WEBINAR

Amelia Slemmings

On Thursday 5th Feb, Amelia delivered an introduction to evaluation webinar, entitled 'How to demonstrate impact' as part of the Your Essex Community - Learning Series. This series aims to support, equip and inspire community groups, voluntary organisations, local leaders and grassroots networks across Essex through free online seminars and webinars. The webinar explored the core stages of impact measurement: planning, data collection, analysis, and reporting and showcased some practical tools that can be used to help in this process.

The session was attended by 35 on the day and will be hosted on the [Your Essex Community You Tube channel](#) as a resource. The session was well received and we have plans to follow this up with a Ripple Effects Mapping workshop off the back of participant interest.



NEW INSIGHT PACK

Henry Sykes

A new insight pack has been developed to better understand Epping and the barriers residents face in being active within the district. This work was presented to the Public Health Board at the start of February.

The work brings together publicly available data, local insight, and community feedback to identify where support is most needed and where physical activity could have the greatest impact. The slide deck presents this in a clear, accessible way for local decision-makers, highlighting patterns in health, demographics, travel, and access to spaces for activity.

This work is already being used by our West Hub team to guide conversations around investment, targeted support, and future planning. It also forms part of our wider approach to supporting districts to make evidence-informed decisions that contribute to a more active and equitable Essex, along with the Place Need Assessments. We will continue supporting the West team as they utilise these findings in their planning and project development.



February 26



NEW PLACE PARTNERSHIP QUARTERLY REPORTING

Rachel Newby

The draft of a new Quarterly Place Partnership Report was reviewed at our Place Partnership Board on 4th February. This report focuses on evaluation and project progress and will be used to support upcoming System Lead meetings in our 6 places.

EXPLORING SYSTEM CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

Evaluation Team & Hartpury

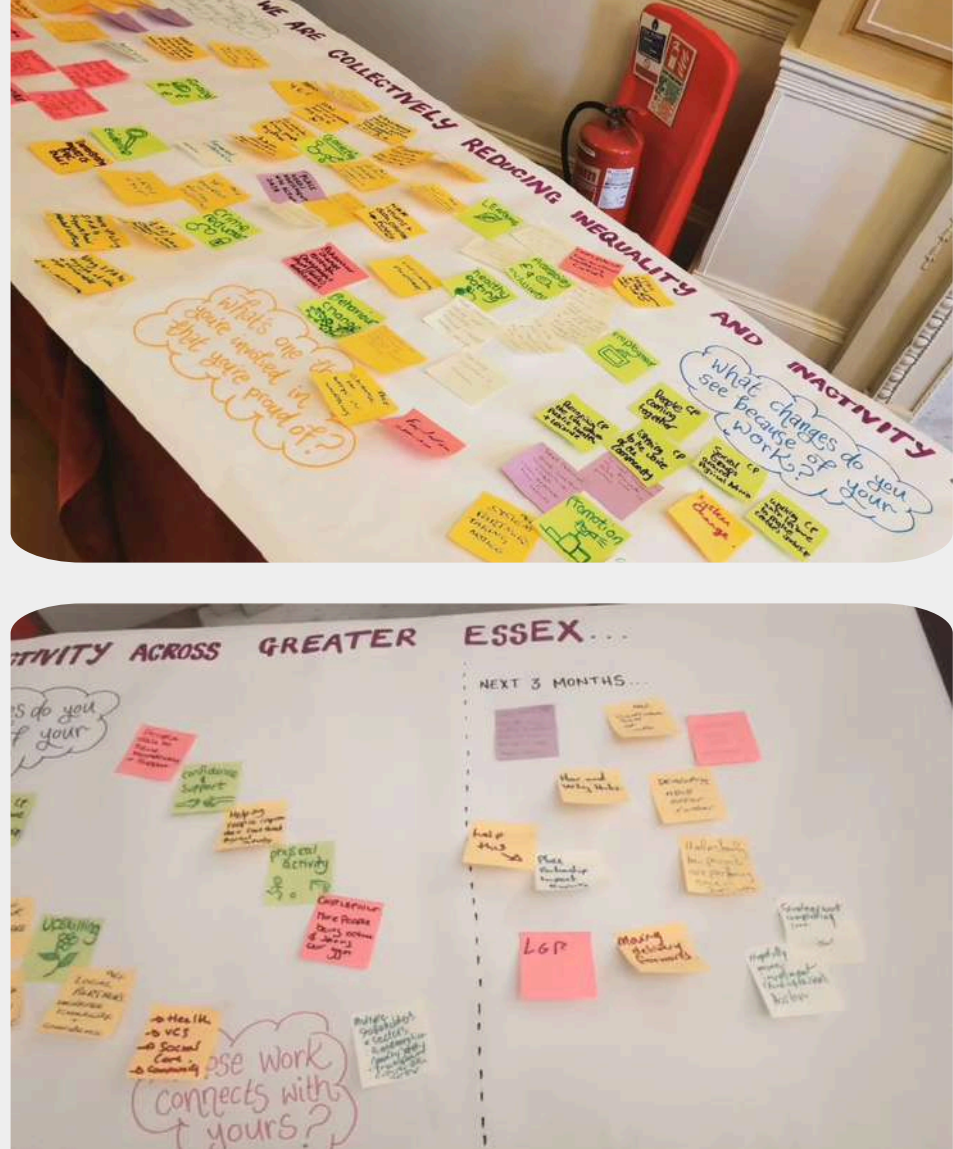
On 30th January our Evaluation Partner Hartpury joined the Place Partnership team to reflect on findings from the Maturity Matrix process and the 9 Conditions for system change.

SHARING LEARNING WITH OUR EAST REGION CLUSTER

Rachel Newby

At our East Cluster day on 28th January Active Essex shared our evaluation approach and some of our experience using the How and Why hub methodology with other Place Partnerships across the Eastern Region pooling knowledge across the cluster.

February 26



SHARE CONNECT COLLABORATE: SMALL MOMENTS, BIG RIPPLES

Tyler Simmons, Vicki Robins, Rachel Newby & Amelia Slemmings

On 21 January attendees gathered at Hylands House for the Share Connect Collaborate Conference. Despite the wet and windy weather outside, the day provided a great opportunity to network and share learning. A Ripple Effects Mapping activity was set up between workshop rooms to capture insights from delegates moving between sessions and capture how individuals and organisations contribute to the shared goal of increasing physical activity across Greater Essex.

Participants added their roles, projects, and future plans to the map highlighting how a wide range of sectors connect and work together to support the system. Common themes emerged, including opportunity provision, employment and skills development, learning opportunities, and healthy eating. These contributions demonstrated the breadth of work taking place and the alignment across organisations.

By the end of the session, the map showed a clear picture of how different partners collaborate toward a shared aim. It reflected the collective effort across the system, illustrating the connections, contributions, and ambitions that support Greater Essex in becoming more active.

January 26

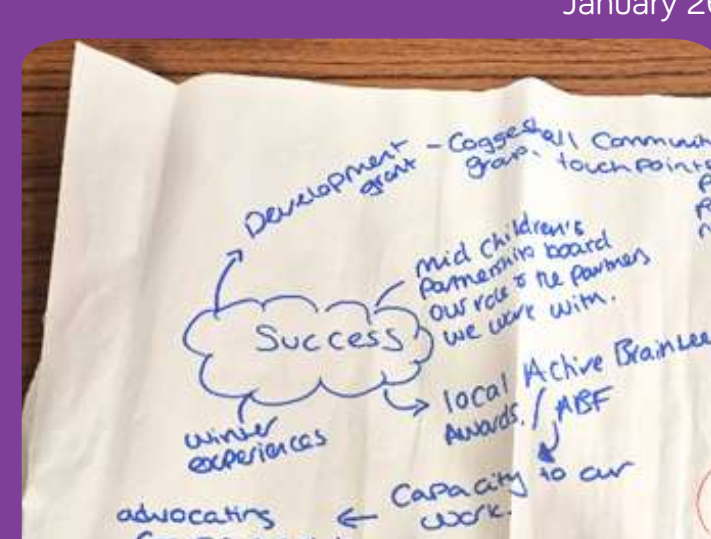
GAINING KNOWLEDGE ON THE SUCCESSES AND INSIGHTS FROM OUR WORK IN PLACE

Summer Gayle

On the 19th January I joined our Relationship Managers (RMs) and Relationship Development Officers (RDOs) at the Quarterly Place Teams meeting, which was an opportunity for the team to share, learn and reflect on the progress of their delivery plans, priorities, and to map key dates for the rest of 2026. Of particular interest for us as an Insight and Evaluation team was the Share and Learn session.

RMs and RDOs reflected on projects delivered in quarter 3 discussing successes and progress made; problem-solving and adaptation opportunities that stood out; and learning opportunities that could be shared across hub areas. The session was incredibly insightful; the teams shared a plethora of achievements, such as the Local Sport awards, HAF Winter Experiences and the start of a new Faith Forum in Basildon, facilitating wider reach to new community groups. The lessons and adaptations that arose in the quarter were equally powerful; some examples of note included closing the gap in CYP work in Thurrock and utilising project management platforms to align project delivery plan work within, and across teams.

The insights shared were really beneficial for us as an evaluation team; understanding what is working, and the challenges faced, allows us as a team to target areas for further research, monitoring, and how to continue the legacy of successful work delivered in our places.



January 26

UNDER THE RADAR LAUNCH EVENT

Mikki Barrett & Summer Gayle

On Friday 16th January, we joined partners at DP World for the launch of Under the Radar, part of Active Essex's Sports Youth Crime Prevention programme. The project aims to support girls and young women aged 11-24 who may be at risk of, or already experiencing, drug-driven exploitation.

We heard from Jennie over on why the initiative was created, followed by Suzanne Page's overview of the programme's approach. One of the standout moments was a powerful talk from Nina Alleyne, who shared her lived experience and her new role as the Independent Development Coordinator.

Summer Gayle and I then introduced the project's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning plan, using an interactive activity to explore how girls can slip "under the radar", the barriers professionals see, and how better collaboration and data-sharing could strengthen our response.

The insights gathered will shape a learning culture from day one, ensuring this project doesn't just launch well, but evolves into something genuinely transformative.



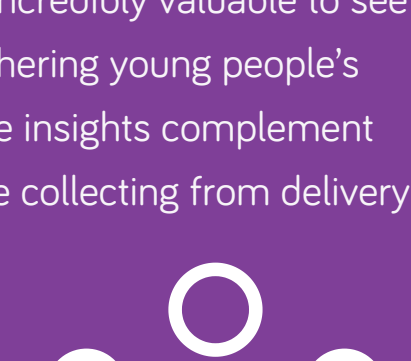
January 26

SPORT YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH FOCUS GROUPS

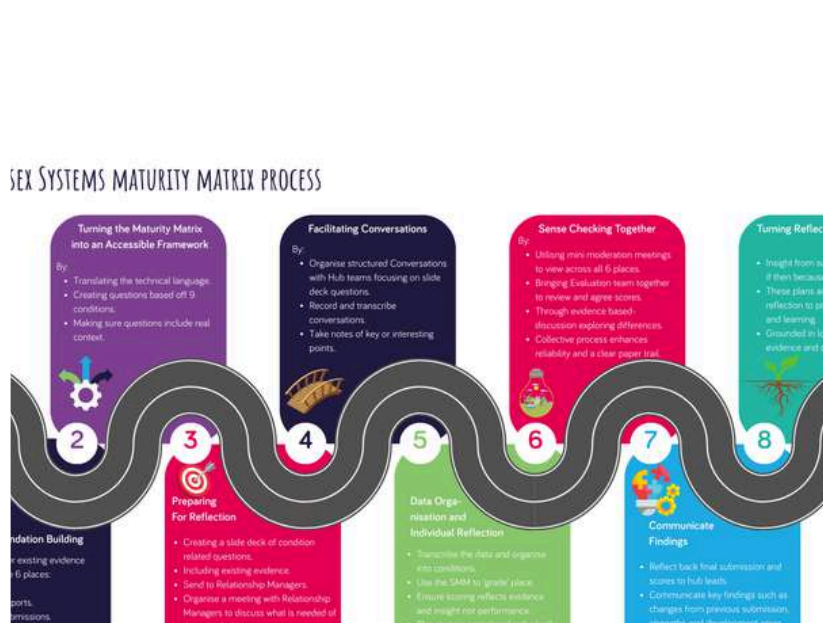
Vicki Robins

To support the Sport Youth Mental Health evaluation, we ran two focus groups with young people at our delivery partners' clubs - Changing Lives in Colchester (5th December) and Trust Links in Westcliff (Jan 12th).

Not only was it wonderful to hear first hand from the young people about the differences the programmes have made, but it was also incredibly valuable to see the activities in action and truly bring the work to life. Gathering young people's voices is an important aspect of this evaluation, and these insights complement the wide range of data and monitoring information we are collecting from delivery partners, young people and the wider system.



January 26



ACTIVE ESSEX HOW & WHY HUB

BUILDING TRUST ACROSS THE SYSTEM

Thanks for joining us for our first How & Why Hub! We hope you enjoyed the discussion and found it a useful time to reflect. Your input helps us gather valuable insight and put learning into action, helping inform practice, strategy, and investment.

SESSION THEMES: WHAT TRUST LOOKS LIKE

- Trust in structure:** In general spaces of collaboration, openness about problems, and willingness to share risk. In high-trust spaces, partners step into shared work even when the path is unclear, or low-trust spaces, they protect their own.
- Build through small, consistent behaviours:** Following through on promises, acknowledging mistakes, early honesty, quick, respectful check-ins (verbally and in writing), and reliable delivery even for one attendee.
- Psychological safety enables creativity:** Vulnerability (gathering people things went wrong) creates a safe climate where people take risks and explore new ideas.
- Trust operates at multiple layers:** Personal relationships (often easier to build) are foundational trust that can be leveraged for system-wide trust.

Link our first How & Why Hub: ["From Insight to Action"](#) 5 March 2026

December 25- January 26

MATURITY MATRIX PROCESS

Tyler Simmons

Following our October Maturity Matrix submission to Sport England we outlined a roadmap of how we will continue to use and share the learnings from the approach as we embed it into our regular practice.

OUR FIRST HOW & WHY HUB: TRUST

Tyler Simmons

On 4th December we hosted the first in our series of upcoming How & Why Hubs, a methodology previously trialled as part of the Local Delivery Pilot to uncover local themes and identify the mechanisms behind lasting change.

"4 AMAZING THINGS" REALIST EVALUATION WEBINAR

Tyler Simmons

In December I invited Tyler to showcase their work to 'showcase their work to research community of practice' four amazing things we can do with realist evaluation', using case studies from the Active Essex programme. Watch the session back [here](#).

WHO ARE WE?



About the Active Essex Evaluation Team

Our in-house Evaluation team provides Evaluation and Analytical support across Active Essex and the Active Essex Foundation.

We also have additional support from our external evaluation partner Hartpury.

LOCALITY WORKING

Each Place Hub has link person from the Evaluation Team to facilitate closer working with the places

This also supports collating evidence throughout the year to support our embedded approach to the Maturity Matrix submission..

The place link provides a regular point of contact, however projects are shared throughout the team to balance workload and capacity.

