

# IMPROVING LIFE AFTER BRAIN INJURY

**HEADWAY  
ESSEX  
NEWS**



**SUMMER 2025**

Registered charity 1008807





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## ABOUT HEADWAY ESSEX

Headway Essex is an independent charity, which provides support to people living with acquired brain injury (ABI) and their families in Essex. We support around 700 people a year across Essex, in the community and at our day centres.

As a charity, our mission is to ensure that everyone in Essex living with an acquired brain injury can live a fulfilling life and families and carers are better able to cope within their caring roles.

Our two day centres in Colchester and Benfleet, offer a specialist person-centred approach to rehabilitate, educate, inform and support each client with their own personal recovery journey.

In the community we provide emotional and practical support to address health and social issues faced by our clients and their families, as a result of brain injury; visiting clients in hospital, in their homes, providing telephone support, and support group meetings across Essex.

Registered Charity Number:  
1008807

Patron: David Tennant  
Company Limited by Guarantee  
Registered in England and Wales  
No. 2674755

# CREATIVITY, TEAMWORK, AND FORWARD THINKING

## Welcome to our summer edition of the Headway Essex News

Our fortieth year is a significant time for us, with a new CEO in post and a fresh energy, we're bringing a renewed focus to our mission: to support even more people who need us and to reach them sooner after their injury.



Tom Harrison has joined us as our new Chief Executive Officer. Tom has succeeded Jo Wright, who stepped down after 27 years of dedicated service to the organisation. Tom brings a wealth of experience within the health and wellbeing sector to his new role. Prior to joining Headway Essex, he served as the CEO of Age Well East



One of the innovations that Tom is bringing to Headway is the implementation of a 1Team culture, harnessing the organisation's collective expertise and passion to provide exceptional services and support.

We have had two very productive planning days, brainstorming and collaborating on exciting ideas for the future. The days have involved the whole Headway Essex Team, alongside our trustees and volunteers. We are looking at our key goals, fresh ideas, and building on our already strong foundation.

We are looking forward to putting our plans into action!

## SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS

Our support group meetings give adults with an acquired brain injury, their carers and loved ones, the chance to meet others who have a brain injury, to share experiences and to hear from experts in brain injury care and rehabilitation.



**Mid Essex Support Group (Chelmsford)**  
Third Tuesday of the month 10:00 – 12:00

**NE Essex Support Group (Colchester)**  
First Tuesday of the month 18:00 - 20:00

**NE Essex Support Group (Clacton)**  
Third Thursday of the month 10:00 - 12:00

**NE Essex Social Evenings (Colchester)**  
Third Monday of the month 17:00 – 19:00

**The 3M Club 'Men Motivating Men'**  
Last Wednesday of the month 18:00 - 20:00

**NE Essex Carers Support Group (Colchester)**  
Last Wednesday of the month 18:00 - 20:00

**South Essex Support Group (Benfleet)**  
Second Tuesday of the month 19:00 – 21:00

**West Essex Support Group (Epping)**  
Fourth Tuesday of the month 10:00 – 12:00

**South Essex Carers Support (Benfleet)**  
Fourth Thursday of the month 19:00 – 21:00

**South Essex Social Group (Benfleet)**  
First Friday of the month 13:30 – 15:30

**Essex Young Circle Support Group (Benfleet)**  
Fourth Wednesday of the month 12:30 – 14:30

**South Essex Support Group (Southend)**  
Second Monday of the month 10:00 - 12:00



If you are interested in attending one of our groups, please contact us on 01206 845945 or email [abisupport@headwayessex.org.uk](mailto:abisupport@headwayessex.org.uk)

**Switalskis**

We would like to say a big thank you to Switalskis Solicitors who generously sponsor our support group in Colchester



## AN UNSUNG HERO

We are very proud of Headway Essex Community Support Worker Sam Preston who received Highly Commended in the Unsung Hero category at the Suffolk and North East Essex ICS 'Can Do' Health and Care Awards in July.



Sam works tirelessly transforming the lives of individuals living with brain injuries and their families. This commendation is a well-deserved acknowledgment of her unwavering dedication.

**Congratulations Sam!**

## UTILITIES PRIORITY SERVICE



Did you know that you can ask to be added to a Priority Services Register with the companies that supply your water, gas and electricity. Utility Companies offer practical help such as reading your meter for you (if you find this difficult), or sending out bills in other formats. It is free to register.

You are eligible for PSR services if you:

- Use medical equipment reliant on electricity or water
- Live with children under five
- Are blind or partially sighted
- Are deaf or hard of hearing
- Have a chronic illness
- Have anxiety, depression or any mental health condition
- Have a disability
- Are of pensionable age
- Loss or impairment of smell

This is a just a small example of who is eligible to register. The utility companies support a wide range of people, including those with a brain injury.

To register contact your service provider.

## ANIMAL MAGIC



There is no denying how beneficial connecting with animals is. We are lucky to have had some wonderful, gentle animals visit us. These beautiful souls were showered with love by our clients and they in return offered comfort and connection.

Being around animals can have a powerful impact on your emotional wellbeing—it can boost your mood and help ease anxiety, depression, or loneliness. It also creates a safe, non-judgmental space that encourages trust and makes it easier to express your emotions.

## THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT!

When tasks get tough, sometimes tech can really come in handy.

We've put together a list of apps that can help with tasks that might be harder after a brain injury



### Speech and Communication

**CT**

**Constant Therapy** – Speech and cognitive therapy exercises designed for people with neurological conditions and communication difficulties



**Proloquo2go** – Providing alternative ways to communicate when verbal speech is limited or challenging

### Emotions



**Headspace** – Guided breathing exercises, muscle relaxation techniques to manage anxiety and improve sleep quality.



**Breathe2Relax** – Support mood stabilisation, anger control and anger management.

### Daily Life

**Cozi Family Organiser** and **Family Wall** - Both apps have shareable app calendars, shopping lists and to-do lists for sharing with the family which can be helpful for planning and structuring weeks and appointments etc.



**Lumosity** – Science-backed, interactive way to train your brain and learn about how your mind works

**BrainHQ** – Neuroscience-backed cognitive training app that helps with processing-speed, memory and attention.

**Elevate** – Improving reading, writing and maths skills.



You can read more on our blog page

[www.headwayessex.org.uk/2025/07/29/the-power-of-technology/](http://www.headwayessex.org.uk/2025/07/29/the-power-of-technology/)



## GIVING BACK – MICHAEL'S STORY

### THIS IS A JOURNEY OF HOPE

Michael Legg is a true inspiration to us all at Headway Essex—especially to the people who benefit from our services and have the chance to hear him speak.



Michael is a Headway Peer Support Volunteer. He has a brain injury himself and volunteers his time to talk to others about his experiences and to help them build a better understanding of the changes their injury has brought to their lives.

He is a wonderful representative for Headway Essex, delivering presentations to brain injury support groups, university students, and at information sharing events. Through these sessions, he helps raise awareness about brain injury by openly and candidly sharing his personal story—how his life changed 16 years ago after a violent attack.

### Finding Headway

Michael has faced many challenges and his life has taken different turns as he navigated his life after a brain injury. He has gone through relationship break down, job loss and a sense of loss of self. He has been through deeply challenging periods of adjustment, marked by feelings of anger and depression, difficulty sleeping, fatigue, and cognitive problems.

Three years ago, he relocated to Essex, a move that brought new challenges. As he adjusted to life without the support network of his close family and friends his depression spiralled.

After a chance conversation with an advisor at the Job Centre who had experience of a brain injury he was recommended to approach Headway Essex.



Michael came to the Headway Centre and later joined the Next Steps project at Essex University where people with a brain injury work with Headway Essex and Occupational Therapy Students from the University.

## Finding purpose and giving back

During these sessions it was suggested that Michael joined our team of volunteers as a Peer Support Volunteer, so he could share his valuable knowledge and his positivity. He is thankful for the support he has received through therapy and counselling and appreciates how it has helped him through his recovery and this was a way to give something back.



Michael joins in our support groups and can sit and share his story or listen to the group's. He brings valuable insight and compassion to our support groups. As someone with lived experience of brain injury, he understands how important it is

to have a space where you can be yourself — free from judgment, pressure, or the need to “mask” your struggles. He knows the relief that comes from being among people who can relate to the challenges they are going through.

For Michael volunteering is a two-way street. Through giving back in this way, Michael in turn gains a lot. He finds real joy in seeing others regain a sense of hope and self. Through his journey, he's learned that acknowledgment and acceptance are vital steps in healing. It's not easy to come to terms with the things you can no longer do, but by openly sharing his challenges and growth, Michael shows others that acceptance is not the end—it's the beginning of a new path forward.

We are very grateful to all of our volunteers for their dedication, kindness and the time that they give. Without their help we wouldn't be able to achieve all that we do.

Thank you to every one of you.

You can read Michael's full story in the News section of our website:  
[www.headwayessex.org.uk/about-us/news/blog/](http://www.headwayessex.org.uk/about-us/news/blog/)

We frequently share updates here—including news about our latest projects, upcoming events, and inspiring stories.

**Take a moment to explore what's new!**





## OUT AND ABOUT IN ESSEX

Essex boasts a varied landscape with Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, coastal areas and historic sites. Here are some that we have visited and loved.

Beach hut day at Clacton on Sea



Our Colchester Centre clients have had an amazing time racing along the purpose built cycle track at the Colchester Sports Park with Wheels for All.

With a variety of specially adapted cycles, everyone can experience the joy of cycling, no matter their ability level.

This valuable program helps improve mobility, fitness, and cognition, boosts confidence, reduces anxiety and depression, and enhances quality of life through independence and fun!



Wheels For All at Colchester Sports Park

Wheels for All have several centres in Essex. Why not look to see if there is one in your area. [www.wheelsforall.org.uk](http://www.wheelsforall.org.uk)

- Colchester Sports Park
- Clacton Shorefields School
- Thorndon Country Park
- Southend Leisure & Tennis Centre

We are so grateful to have such supportive, friendly organisations in our region like Barnards Farm in West Horndon.

Our Benfleet Support Group recently enjoyed a wonderful day exploring the gardens and taking in the beautiful surroundings. It was a great opportunity to unwind, connect with nature, and support wellbeing.

We can't express enough the feel good factor that Barnards Farm provides for our clients and carers who are living with the effects of a brain injury.

Barnards Farm Gardens are open every Thursday from 5th June 2025 to 28th August 2025 and are part of the National Garden Scheme.

[www.barnardsfarm.eu/](http://www.barnardsfarm.eu/)



Barnards Farm Gardens

Highwoods Country Park is virtually on our doorstep in Colchester. We made the most of it and spent the day in the countryside enjoying the accessible walks and connecting with nature.

If this looks like your kind of thing you can find more details here.

[www.accessiblecountryside.org.uk/essex](http://www.accessiblecountryside.org.uk/essex)



Highwoods Country Park



# HEADWAY ESSEX

# Classic



SUNDAY 21 SEPTEMBER 2025 **VEHICLE SHOW** 10:30 - 16:00

COLCHESTER CASTLE PARK

★ CLASSIC CARS, MOTORBIKES, TRUCKS AND OTHER VEHICLES ★  
DANCING ★ RETRO MUSIC ★ STALLS ★ FOOD & DRINK ★ ENTERTAINMENT



Book your tickets here!  
[www.headwayessex.org.uk](http://www.headwayessex.org.uk)

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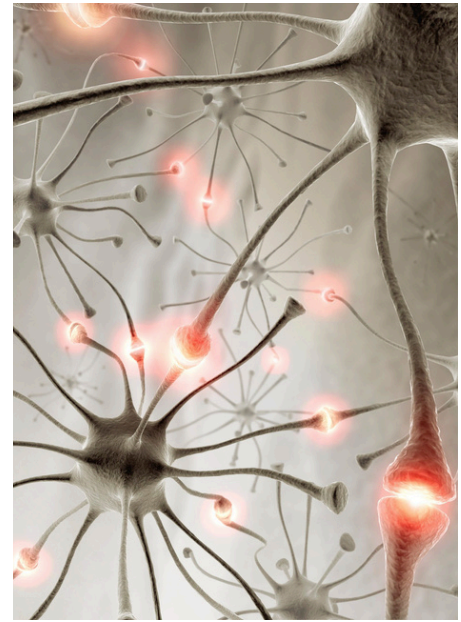


# NEUROPLASTICITY IS YOUR FRIEND

**Neuroplasticity, simply put, is the brain's ability to rewire itself. It offers a beacon of hope to people who have had a brain injury as the brain has a remarkable ability to change.**

When the brain is injured, the neural pathways get damaged, stopping vital messages passing between the nerve cells (neurons).

Damaged brain cells can't repair themselves but oftentimes the brain can build new neural pathways around the damage. It is able to re-organise itself both in its structure and how it functions.



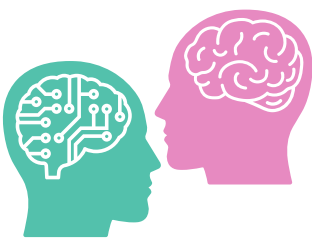
You can create new neural pathways by learning new skills (or re-training old ones you have lost) and through new experiences.

Repetition and practice strengthen these neural connections.

The great news is the brain is always learning and adapting!

Here are some facts about neuroplasticity:

It takes time! Be patient with yourself. It takes thousands of repetitions to fully master a new skill so the more time you spend practicing the better.



Every thought, movement, action or skill has a separate connection in the brain.

The more you practice something the stronger the connections become. E.g With Aphasia the more you talk, listen, read and write the better your speed and accuracy will be.

Emotions have an affect on how much your brain takes in. If your therapy is enjoyable or important to you, you will learn more easily.



Keep challenging yourself with new skills to see more of a difference. If you are going through the motions and no-longer finding something challenging it could be time to change things up.

**Our brains are the most flexible when we're young but connections grow and change at any age. It's never too late to get started!**

# COOK Together



In July we welcomed Clare Mitchell, founder of Radish Community Cookery to our Benfleet Centre. Clare used her extensive teaching experience in practical cookery and food education to deliver a fun, five-week hands on cookery course.

Making a meal may seem like a simple daily task, but it can become a challenge after a brain injury. Cooking can be complicated and uses a lot of different functions of the brain, including our executive functions, memory, and motor skills. If these have been affected by a brain injury, tasks like remembering ingredients, following recipes, managing time, or coordinating movements, can become difficult.

Despite the challenges these are important skills to re-master. They help with rehabilitation, rebuilding confidence - and most importantly making it fun to get back in the kitchen and cook!



The last five weeks have been fabulous, not only have we been cooking delicious food we, have learnt new skills to boot. Don't worry if you have missed these Cook Together sessions, we will be running more on Canvey Island in September. If you are interested in learning more, please contact us on 01206 845945 or email [abisupport@headwayessex.org.uk](mailto:abisupport@headwayessex.org.uk)

## HAVE YOU APPLIED FOR YOUR BRAIN INJURY IDENTITY CARD?



The effects of a brain injury can affect people in ways that aren't easy to see.

Carrying an official Headway Brain Injury Identity Card can give you peace of mind, knowing that your needs can be quickly recognised in any situation—whether you're in a social setting or interacting with police or emergency services.

Find out more and apply for a card today  
[www.headway.org.uk/supporting-you/brain-injury-identity-card/](http://www.headway.org.uk/supporting-you/brain-injury-identity-card/)





Tom Hicks and Earl Woolfe have recently joined our Benfleet team as support workers. They are psychology postgraduates and are a great asset to the team.

Tom - Psychology BSc & Cognitive Neuroscience MSc

Earl - Psychology BSc & Organisational Psychology MSc



# TAKE IT ON!

## Are you up for a challenge?

Check out our exciting calendar of activities. We have the perfect fundraising challenge for you.

**Take on a challenge and make a huge difference to Headway Essex**

Head over to [www.headwayessex.org.uk/i-want-to-help-2/our-events/](http://www.headwayessex.org.uk/i-want-to-help-2/our-events/) to find out more



## CONCUSSION - IF IN DOUBT SIT IT OUT!

Most head injuries are not serious, but it's important to get medical help if you or someone you know have any symptoms after a head injury. You might have concussion (temporary brain injury) that can last a few weeks, or sometimes can develop into post-concussion syndrome. Whether on the field or off, head injuries are easy to overlook, but how do we recognise when someone has concussion and why is it important?

### Symptoms can be:

- **Headache or feeling pressure in your head**
- **Can't recall events before or after hit or fall**
- **Nausea**
- **Vomiting**
- **Dizziness or balance issues**
- **Loss of muscle tone (limpness)**
- **Sensitivity to noise or light**
- **Feeling unusually emotional, nervous, or sad**

### Signs can be:

- **Loss of consciousness (this isn't always the case)**
- **Disorientation**
- **Incoherent speech**
- **Confusion**
- **Dazed or vacant**

### What to do

Seek medical help straight away if you suspect you, or someone you know may have concussion. Do not return to the field or resume the activity that caused the injury within the first 24 hours of a suspected concussion.  
**IF IN DOUBT, SIT IT OUT!**

**Keep a close eye on the person — make sure they're not alone for the first 24 hours. To help the brain heal safely, it's best to avoid alcohol and hold off on driving until all symptoms have completely gone.**

You can read more on our blog page  
[www.headwayessex.org.uk/2025/07/18/concussion-if-in-doubt-sit-it-out/](http://www.headwayessex.org.uk/2025/07/18/concussion-if-in-doubt-sit-it-out/)



# RUN / SKY DIVE / CLIMB / WING WALK

**It's not just about taking on a personal challenge, it's about raising money and changing lives.**

We are so grateful to all of you that have taken on a challenge for us and have thrown yourselves from a plane, run the extra mile or pushed yourselves that bit further on our behalf.

As a charity we rely on fundraising and grants to enable us to provide our services. Because of you we are able to continue our work and ensure that someone with a brain injury can feel safe and supported.



## Meet Kelly

We wish Kelly Le Friant, our new Fundraising Manager a warm welcome. Kelly has hit the ground running, getting to know our clients, our services and supporters.

She's not just good at talking the talk, Kelly is joining twelve other amazing people who are walking Snowdon by Night in August to raise funds for Headway Essex.



Want to raise money to support Headway Essex, but not quite sure where to start? Whether it's your first time or if you are a regular fundraiser, it's always nice to get some more inspiration, support and advice. Why not call us for a chat on 01206 845945 .

We are reaching out to sports groups and schools to offer a short, engaging talk on how to spot the signs of concussion.

**OUR GOAL IS TO HELP STUDENTS, COACHES,  
AND PARENTS FEEL MORE CONFIDENT  
ABOUT IDENTIFYING CONCUSSION  
SYMPTOMS AND KNOWING WHAT TO DO  
NEXT.**

Concussions can be tricky to recognise, especially in kids and young athletes, and knowing what to look for can make a big difference.

**Interested in having us visit your school or group?  
Reach out to us to schedule a session.**



## FOLLOW OUR STORY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

We have lively social media accounts with regular updates and photos of our activities and events.



Facebook: @headway.essex



Instagram: @headwayessex



LinkedIn: headway-essex

[www.headwayessex.org.uk](http://www.headwayessex.org.uk)

## CONTACT US

### FUNDRAISING & MARKETING:

[fundraising@headwayessex.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@headwayessex.org.uk)  
01206 845945 (option 5)

6th Floor Annex, Wellington House,  
90-92 Butt Road, Colchester, Essex,  
CO3 3DA

### COMMUNITY SUPPORT:

[abisupport@headwayessex.org.uk](mailto:abisupport@headwayessex.org.uk)  
01206 845945 (option 3)

### THE HEADWAY CENTRE

[dayservice@headwayessex.org.uk](mailto:dayservice@headwayessex.org.uk)  
01206 845945 (option 4)

#### (North Essex)

The Headway Centre,  
Woodland Walk, Colchester, CO4 6DH

#### (South Essex)

The Benfleet Methodist Church,  
High Road, South Benfleet, SS7 5LH

Proudly supporting the community for forty years

