

Marie Goldman

MP for Chelmsford



Let's celebrate army of volunteers giving their spare time for others

THIS is my final column for 2025. As many of us look forward to spending more time with our loved ones over the Christmas period, I find myself looking back over 2025 and reflecting on all the amazing people I've met in the myriad different organisations I've visited or been in contact with during the year.

What strikes me is something very simple: none of these organisations would be anything without the people working or volunteering for them.

It sounds obvious, doesn't it? Of course we need wonderful, talented, dedicated individuals to get things done. But then there's so much talk of Artificial Intelligence (AI) taking over everything that it can be tempting to think that all of us will be replaced with a bot one day. Well, maybe, but while I think that AI will undoubtedly play an ever-increasing role in our lives, there are some things that a robot - even a super-intelligent one - can't do.

Thinking back to the fabulous charities I've met in Chelmsford over the past year, there are so many doing fantastic work that it almost seems unfair to single any out in particular, but here are a few highlights from my 2025 visits.

In January, I spent a rather cold and blustery winter's morning with the dedicated Chelmsford Litter Wombles - a fabulous group that turns out all year round in large numbers to help keep our streets, verges, parks and everywhere else in between, free from litter.

Armed with gloves, bags and a sturdy litter picker, each volunteer gives up hours of their time every week to creating a nicer environment for us all. I think that's amazing. Rather than complaining about unsightly rubbish being blown around by the wind, or perhaps scavenged by our many Chelmsfordian foxes, and rather than pointing the finger to say it's someone else's problem, they roll up their sleeves and get stuck in. Fabulous! True British values in action.

In March, I visited Open Road, a key drug and alcohol support service based in Chelmsford. Hearing about the important,



Marie Goldman MP with Service Dogs UK
PHOTOS: MARIE GOLDMAN MP



Marie Goldman MP at the 'It's My Life Family Fun Day'



Marie Goldman MP at Open Road



Marie Goldman MP at The Independence Project

often life-saving work they do with people with addiction problems was incredibly heartwarming. I was delighted to attend a reception in Parliament just last week, celebrating the work they do. And when I've been in Chelmsford city centre on a Saturday night, on more than one occasion I've stopped in to speak to the volunteers manning the Open Road SOS bus - helping those whose nights out haven't quite gone according to plan, giving them the support they

need often therefore avoiding a trip to A&E (and the expense the NHS would then incur). April saw a visit to the brilliant Independence Project, right in the heart of the Chelmsford constituency. This fabulous little organisation provides opportunities for people with learning disabilities and autism to achieve independence. What's not to love about that? The team do such an amazing job of supporting those who are perhaps less fortunate than many of us by giving them the skills and opportunities they need to lead rich and fulfilling lives. How many of us can truly say we do that on a daily basis? In June, I loved meeting so many of the voluntary organisations taking

part in Volfest, the annual celebration of local voluntary services in Chelmsford High Street. One that stuck out for me (and yes, it is partly because I am a sucker for a cute animal) was Service Dogs UK. They provide veterans from the Armed Forces and the Emergency Services suffering from PTSD specially trained assistance dogs to help them find and grow their confidence. I heard what a complete life-changing and sometimes life-saving service this is for the ex-service men and women they support. Heart-breaking stories, but wonderful to hear. In August, I had the opportunity to attend the 'It's My Life Family Fun Day' - a special event for families

involved in adoption, Special Guardianship Orders, kinship care and post-adoption arrangements. Supported by both paid staff and volunteers, it really was great to see so many families and children laughing, playing and enjoying the day. Not all children get the easiest start in life, and that can have a huge impact on the rest of their lives, so it's especially lovely to see first-hand what a positive influence these sorts of events have, and meet those they affect most. Growbaby, in Moulsham Street, leaps to the forefront of my mind when thinking about great local charities. Not just because of the much-needed yet simple task it performs of providing a kind of free swap shop for clothes for children aged 0-11 years, but also because of the wonderful community hub that comes with the service it provides. When I visited, at the beginning of October, the place was buzzing with conversations and friendships being formed and strengthened. People - humans - no matter their background, were overcoming language and artificial social barriers to chat, smile and support each other. There was something really rather beautiful about it. Well done to all the team of volunteers who I know work so hard to provide a safe environment to make that happen. There were so many other fabulous organisations I could mention from 2025 - and the ones above are only some of the organisations I met in and around my constituency. There are so many more that I met in Westminster and who are doing amazing things on a national level. But the takeaway for me is this: all of these organisations are supported by an army of volunteers. People who give up their time, free of charge, to help others. I think that's something to celebrate, to champion and to shout about, especially at this time of year. Please spare a thought for all those continuing to help others over the festive period. Oh, and if you fancy joining in, please do contact Chelmsford CVS, which coordinates the voluntary sector in Chelmsford - there are always lots of organisations looking out for new volunteer recruits. I hope you have a lovely festive season. Hold your loved ones tight, raise a glass to those not with us, and celebrate in style the dawning of a new year. See you in 2026! Thanks for reading.

“ I think that's something to celebrate, to champion and to shout about, especially at this time of year. **”**