



# **Trustees' Annual Report 2023–24**



# Table of Contents

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**01**

**Foreword from our Chair**

**06**

**Financial Review**

**02**

**Objectives**

**07**

**Accounts**

**03**

**Activities**

**08**

**Reference & Administrative  
details**

**04**

**Our Achievements**

**09**

**Declarations**

**05**

**Structure, Governance &  
Management**

# 01 Foreword

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Welcome to our 4th annual report. The phrase “time flies whilst you’re having fun” could not be more apt for the entire ROAM community—whether it’s the joy of seeing our children thrive in nature or the pride felt by our dedicated volunteers watching their development. These moments of connection, growth, and play are at the heart of everything we do.

Over the past year, ROAM has continued to deliver a wide range of engaging sessions, creating opportunities for children to explore, play, and grow. We are especially excited about the significant progress made in piloting new sites for both ROAM Free and our Outdoor Playgroups. These developments mark an important step in our mission to reach even more families and engage with new communities, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to experience the joy and benefits of outdoor play.

Beyond our sessions, we remain steadfast advocates for children’s rights to access green spaces, particularly in urban areas where such opportunities can be limited. It’s a cause that’s not only close to our hearts but vital for the well-being of the next generation.

Finally, on behalf of the board, I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to Joanne Burrill, whose invaluable expertise and unwavering support have been instrumental, not only in guiding us through the formalities of establishing ROAM as a charity but also in sharing her wise counsel based on her wealth of experience. In addition, I would also like to acknowledge the support given by Sumeer Aggarwal for his time as treasurer during ROAM’s formative years and then continuing as a co-opted board member whilst our new trustees transitioned to the board. We wish you both well and we know you will continue to proudly follow ROAM’s future endeavours.

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As we reflect on another remarkable year, we are filled with gratitude for our children, families, volunteers, and supporters who make ROAM possible. We would also like to extend a special thank you to our funders, whose generosity enables us to continue creating opportunities for outdoor play and exploration. Together, we are building the confidence and resilience of the next generation who will be the future custodians of our natural environment.

### **Laura Smiley, Chair of Trustees**





# 02 Objectives

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## Our Objects

ROAM was set up with the aim of facilitating children's freedom to explore nature unsupervised; something that was normal for primary school aged children until about 30 years ago yet has since almost disappeared in the UK.



### Our Objects are:

- To help children and young people especially but not exclusively through leisure time activities, so as to develop their capabilities that they may grow to full maturity as individuals and members of society.
- To promote the good health of children and young people by providing facilities and/or organising opportunities for young people to participate in open-air recreational activities.

in each case for the benefit of the public.

# Our Mission, Vision & Values

## Our Mission

Our mission is to facilitate children's free play in nature with minimal supervision, to support others to do so, and to campaign for every child's right to independent play.

## Our Vision

Our vision is to facilitate a culture where it is considered healthy and normal for children to play unsupervised in their natural environment.

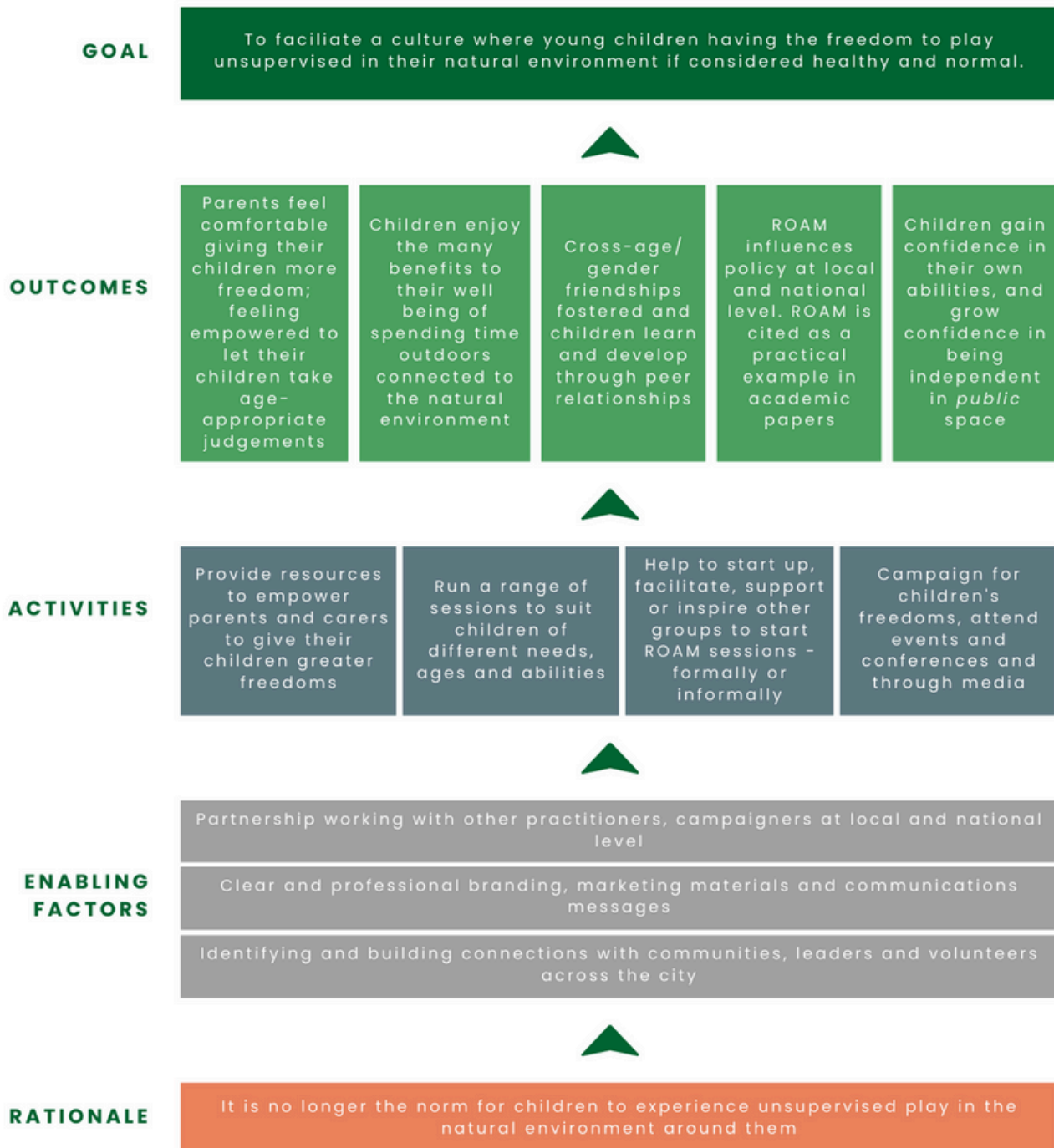
## Our Values

- We are proactively inclusive; seeking ways to meet children's rights to independently play outside irrespective of their physical ability or any disability, social or economic barriers, gender, ethnicity, access to appropriate clothing, and any other barriers that we identify through the course of our work. We strive to make our sessions accessible, embracing neurodiversity, and to embed a culture of inclusion in all of our work that is reflected in the actions of everyone involved.
- We foster a culture where imperfection is embraced; we learn through our mistakes more than our successes. We encourage the bravery in trying, and promote a non judgemental culture of supportiveness. We embrace a culture of learning and sharing the grey areas in order to make the experience more valuable for everyone and for no one to fear a consequence of a perceived 'failure'.
- We are responsible and rigorous; acknowledging that whilst the participating children's experience is rooted in freedom, the activities we run are underpinned by procedures that reflect the high level of responsibility in which we are placed. We are rigorous in the application of the procedures that we have carefully developed to facilitate this.
- We are action-orientated, and research backed. We embrace innovation through trial and refinement, but place this continually within the wider academic and research context; learning through the complementary work of other organisations too, and aiming to embed best practice of children's play and freedom.

These values are embedded in our organisation and we are committed to promoting these values to all stakeholders; be they participants, parents/ carers, Board members, session leaders and volunteers.

# Theory of Change

In January 2020, ROAM developed a Theory of Change to outline how we will deliver and measure the success of our intended social outcomes/ impact.





## 03 Activities

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### ROAM Sessions

Over the past year, we have continued to deliver a range of sessions not just in our local community, but also at two new sites in Birmingham. In total, we welcomed 293 children and their families to our sessions, most of them many times.



### ROAM Free

Our first model that enables children under 11 to play entirely self-directed with minimal supervision in a public park. We delivered 25 funded sessions reaching 46 children. We also piloted our ROAM Free Sessions in Swanshurst Park, testing the model in a new location.

### Rocking ROAM

A supervised session with (mostly younger) children not yet ready to access ROAM Free. It includes self-directed play in nature, assessing own capabilities to run, jump and climb in the natural environment. We delivered 27 sessions over the year, reaching 78 children.



## ROAM-IN

These sessions provide access to self-directed free play in nature for children with additional needs and their siblings, for whom ROAM Free may be considered too risky or inaccessible due to their play preferences, for example. Sessions take place in secure, private grounds. We delivered 15 sessions over the year, reaching 56 children and their families. .

## ROAM Outdoor Playgroup

Initially started during the pandemic to address both preschooler and parent isolation, these sessions remained very popular and have continued regularly since 2021. Our sessions in Cotteridge Park ran weekly throughout term time, and, we delivered 33 sessions over the year with 113 children and their families attending.

This year we also piloted our Playgroup at a new site – Manor Farm Park, Northfield. These six sessions reached 33 new families.



## Contribution from Volunteers

In Autumn 2023, through a connection with Bishop Challoner College, we were able to engage and train a cohort of student volunteers, preparing them to support our ROAM-IN sessions.

In ROAM Free, both existing and new volunteers assisted leaders in the successful delivery of these sessions.

Finally, our Board of Trustees generously contributed their expertise, dedication and commitment throughout this busy year.

Overall, the contribution of our volunteers has been invaluable to the organisation; we are incredibly grateful for their support.





## 04 Our Achievements

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This year has been a journey of growth, resilience, and community. From piloting new projects to advocating for children's independence, we've faced challenges head-on and celebrated meaningful successes.

Through initiatives like our Playgroup and ROAM Free pilots at new sites, we've not only refined our approach but deepened our understanding of how best to connect with new communities. Alongside our pilot projects, community events, and advocacy efforts, we've continued to champion the transformative power of unstructured outdoor play for children and families alike. The impact of our work is clear in the joy of a child discovering the thrill of freedom in nature or the sense of connection parents find in shared green spaces.

One moment that truly captured the spirit of this year was our Crowdfunder campaign in Autumn 2023. When funding for our Outdoor Playgroup sessions ran out, leaving us unable to continue, we turned to the community for support. We hoped to raise enough to see us through a few more sessions, but the overwhelming response went beyond our wildest dreams. Our Community rallied behind us, demonstrating just how much this work means to them. It was a humbling reminder of the value these sessions hold for so many.

At the heart of every achievement are the voices of children and families who've experienced the joy, growth, and connection that come from our sessions. Their feedback reminds us why this work is so vital.

## Pilot Projects

This year, we successfully piloted both our ROAM Free and Playgroup models at new sites, allowing us to trial our approach in different settings and gather valuable insights to guide future developments.

### Playgroup Pilot

We ran six pilot sessions of our outdoor playgroup at Manor Farm Park in Northfield, with 33 children participating. Each session offered a wide range of activities designed to encourage free play and foster a connection with nature. Children enjoyed crafting, obstacle courses, mud kitchens, and potion making, while parents appreciated the opportunity for their children to engage in outdoor play. As the sessions progressed, both children and parents grew in confidence, with many families returning week after week.

Feedback from the sessions was overwhelmingly positive. All respondents agreed that their children enjoyed the sessions, and many reported increased interest in outdoor activities. Parents also noted benefits to their children's motor skills, confidence, and connection with nature. The sessions also strengthened community ties, with two-thirds of participants feeling more engaged with their local area.

As part of this project we were also awarded funding to develop a Playgroup Manual that outlines the steps for setting up similar groups. This manual is intended to be a resource for other community groups who are inspired by our model and wish to replicate it in their own local green spaces. By offering this resource, we aim to empower others to promote outdoor play and connection to nature, without the need for us to manage new sites.



## ROAM Free Pilot

Our ROAM Free pilot sessions ran at Swanshurst Park, Billesley in November 2023.

Despite lower than anticipated attendance, those who participated offered positive feedback. The children found Swanshurst Park's more wild and varied landscapes exciting, with its sense of adventure sparking their imaginations in new ways.



The pilot reaffirmed the importance of working closely with local communities and ensuring we engage families in advance to build interest, especially when entering new areas. Despite the challenges, the success of the sessions highlights Swanshurst Park as a potential future location for ROAM Free activities. Both pilots have been instrumental in refining our approach, and the lessons learned will shape our future work.

We continue to receive enquiries from families eager for more sessions, and we are excited to explore future collaborations with local groups and share our learnings widely to inspire others to bring ROAM's ethos to their communities.

## Commissioned Work

On 15th August, ROAM was commissioned by the Cadbury Barn Trust to deliver a ROAM Free session as part of their summer activity programme at Manor Farm Park.





## Campaigning & Events

### Growing Up Green Festival

On 14th June 2023, ROAM participated in the city-wide Growing Up Green Festival. Represented by Naomi and Jasmine, we participated in the 'Raising Green People' evening event, which brought together adults to discuss the challenges of raising children in the context of the climate crisis. This event allowed us to engage with a wider audience and contribute to important conversations around sustainability and parenting.

### Cocomad Festival

On 1st July 2023, ROAM was invited once again to host a stand at Cocomad, a local community festival. We were based in Millennium Wood where we organised nature-based challenges and activities to encourage families to connect with nature. This event enabled us to engage directly with the public and promote outdoor play.

### The MAC Big Green Weekender

On 15th September 2023, ROAM participated in The MAC Big Green Weekender, a free family festival aimed at encouraging community engagement and environmental action. Led by Naomi, with support from Jasmine and Sarah Green, we used this opportunity to connect with local families and raise awareness of our mission. The festival was a fantastic platform for inspiring action and promoting community involvement.



## Sunday Times Feature

In August 2023, Naomi was interviewed by The Sunday Times for an article exploring the topic of children's independence. The piece highlights how modern parenting trends, marked by over-supervision, may inadvertently hinder children's resilience and mental health. By contrast, ROAM's approach—providing children with the freedom to explore, climb, and engage in minimally supervised play—demonstrates the value of encouraging independence and calculated risk-taking.

The article references ROAM's play sessions in Birmingham as a model for fostering confidence and joy in children. It echoes the perspectives of experts who argue that declining opportunities for unstructured play contribute to rising rates of anxiety and depression in young people.

Following the feature, we received enquiries from across the UK, reflecting a growing interest in our work.

## WMCA Roundtable

On 27th September 2023, Naomi represented ROAM at a roundtable event hosted by Arcadis on behalf of Birmingham City Council. The event, which focused on the Council's 'Our Future City Framework' vision for 2040, brought together city leaders from both the private and public sectors. ROAM's involvement ensured the voice of the community was heard, with Naomi highlighting the disparities in access to green space and the impact on children's outcomes. This event also provided us with an invaluable opportunity to raise ROAM's profile and advocate for children's independence, transport, and safety in urban planning discussions. Follow-up conversations are planned, which may offer further opportunities for us to contribute to future dialogues on these critical issues.

# Get up that tree, kids — it's time for a game of risk

Obsessive parenting has been the default for decades. But evidence now suggests it did more harm than good, writes *Rosie Kinchen*



Six years ago, Naomi Fisher decided to try something that felt radical. The community architect and mother of three was tired of forcing her eight-year-old son to stay in the playground with her and his toddler sister, when all he really wanted was to roam around. "I knew I'd done that at his age," says Fisher. "But I was really struggling with the whole concept. I thought, 'I can't just let him go off'."

She discussed the conundrum with some like-minded parents and together they decided to try. They gave their five children basic rules: "We said, 'Stay in the park boundaries, stay in a group and look after each other'," Fisher says. Then they let them get on with it. The children came back an hour and a half later, muddy, wet and grinning. "They thought it was the best thing ever."

Fisher built a charity based on that experiment. ROAM hosts play sessions in parks around Birmingham five times a week, allowing children to run, climb and jump in streams with minimal supervision. They have fun, but crucially they get a taste of something that is increasingly hard to come by: risk.

Exposing young children to risk may be critical if they are to flourish later in

life. The news agenda is full of stories of adolescent mental health crises, and the NHS has warned of a "national emergency", suggesting a quarter of 17 to 19-year-olds are likely to be suffering from a mental health condition. There are months-long waiting lists for talking therapies, and schools are trying everything from mindfulness classes to therapy dogs to support anxious teenagers.

There are many theories as to why this is the case, from the onward march of technology to pandemic isolation, but a number of academics and experts argue that the root of the problem may be closer to home.

In a paper to be published in the *Journal of Pediatrics* this month, Peter Gray, a professor at Boston College in the US, argues the primary cause of the rise in mental disorders is a "decline over decades in opportunities for children and teens to play, roam and engage in other activities independent of direct oversight and control by adults". In other words, helicopter parenting may be harming children's mental health. "It's almost like we are training our young people to be helpless," says Gray.

My youngest son is starting school this week. On the first day of term tomorrow, he will take his first small steps towards independence. But his journey will be



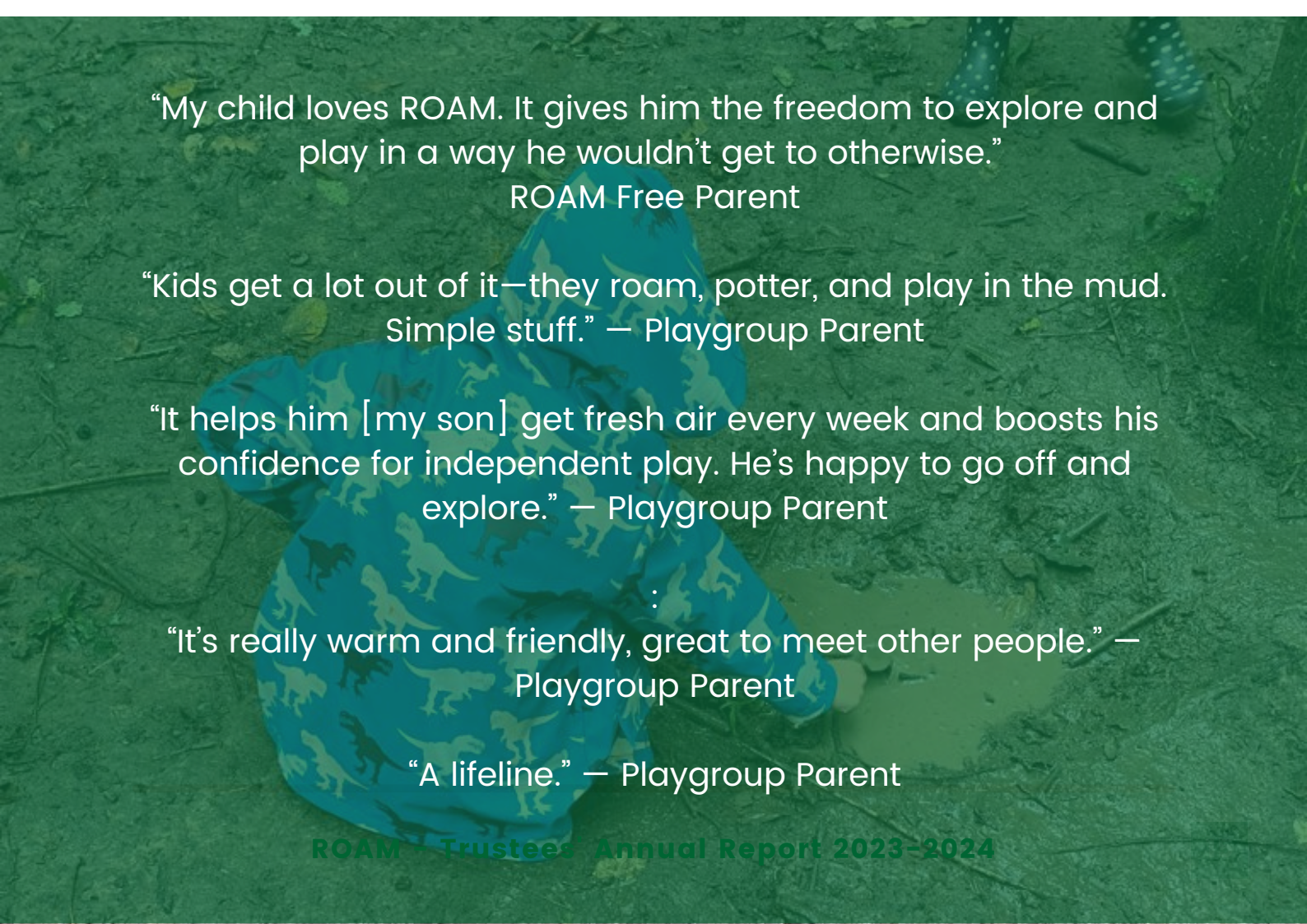
## Impact on Children and Families

ROAM continues to provide children with the freedom to explore and engage in self-directed play in nature, which remains central to our mission.

However our sessions have become more than just opportunities for play; they provide safe spaces for social interaction for both children and their families. Through play, we help children build confidence, resilience, and independence, while creating peer networks and fostering a sense of community for parents and carers.

The feedback we've received from families during the year underscores the positive impact our sessions have had. Parents describe how these sessions have been essential in helping their children grow and develop, while also providing much-needed support to families.

The importance of our sessions extends beyond just the children. Parents have shared how these activities have created a sense of belonging and connection to their local community

A child wearing a blue raincoat with a yellow and green dinosaur pattern is sitting in the mud. The background is a dark, textured ground covered in mud and some dry leaves. The text is overlaid on the image in a white, sans-serif font.

“My child loves ROAM. It gives him the freedom to explore and play in a way he wouldn't get to otherwise.”

ROAM Free Parent

“Kids get a lot out of it—they roam, potter, and play in the mud. Simple stuff.” — Playgroup Parent

“It helps him [my son] get fresh air every week and boosts his confidence for independent play. He's happy to go off and explore.” — Playgroup Parent

“It's really warm and friendly, great to meet other people.” — Playgroup Parent

“A lifeline.” — Playgroup Parent



## Organisational Development

During the year, ROAM made positive progress in implementing some of the organisation's business objectives. This included piloting a new ROAM Free site and piloting our playgroup in a new setting as part of our Neighbourhood ROAM development strand. We also promoted our mission at new events for the first time. This was in spite of facing challenges from a funding perspective as well as changes in governance.

July 2023 marked three years since the charity was founded, and the end of the first term for our founding trustees. During the year, one trustee and one board member stepped down, and two more expressed their intention to step down from the Board, whilst we sought new recruits. As a small charity, the recruitment of new trustees is disproportionately time consuming and this did impact on the time and focus we had available for organisational development. In addition, with upcoming changes in the Board make up, it was appropriate to wait for new trustees to be on board before instigating any significant organisational development.

As the year also involved a particularly challenging funding landscape, bringing in sufficient funds to run sessions was the priority over organisational development. These challenging conditions did, however, focus the Board's attention on developing and maintaining a robust organisational risk register; now a standing item on the Board's quarterly meetings.

## Marketing & Communications

- Our social media engagement continued to grow throughout the year with 107 new followers on Facebook and increasing our following to 851 on Twitter.
- We sent out nine e-newsletters promoting our mission and activities by the end of the year our distribution list totalled 430 contacts.



## Grants

We were fortunate to have submitted and won several grant applications over the course of the year, primarily for project funding:

- John Feeney Charitable Trust – Funding to pilot our playgroup sessions and create a manual of resources for other groups.
- The Eveson Trust – Funding for ROAM-IN Sessions.
- The Sir John Middlemore Charitable Trust– Additional funding for ROAM-IN Sessions in 2024.
- Awards for All – Funding for ROAM Free, Rocking ROAM and Playgroup sessions.
- We also received grants to support our core funding and general project development from The Fitton Trust, The W E Dunn Trust, The Edgar E Lawley Foundation, The Roughley Trust and The Grantham Yorke Trust.

# 05 Structure, Governance & Management

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ROAM is a registered charity (CIO), charity number 1190230 (July 2020).

## The Board

The Board comprises the Leadership Team, five Non-Executive Directors and two Co-opted Board Members. The five Non-Executive Directors are all registered with the Charity Commission as trustees. All other Board members are non-voting. Four Board Meetings are held per year.

Laura Smiley	Chair	
Joanne Burrill	Trustee	Appointed July 2020 – Resigned June 2023
Geraldine Cole	Treasurer	
Sana Duncan	Trustee	
Gaynor Zargar	Safeguarding Lead	
Sumeer Aggarwal	Co-opted Board Member	Co-opted April 2022 – Resigned June 2023
Lisa Walke	Co-opted Board Member	
Naomi Fisher	Strategic Lead & Executive Officer	

At any time there must be at least three charity trustees, If the number falls below this minimum, the remaining charity trustee or trustees may act only to call a meeting of the charity trustees, or appoint a new charity trustee. Every charity trustee must be appointed for a term of three years by a resolution passed at a properly convened meeting of the charity trustees.

In selecting individuals for appointment as charity trustees, the charity trustees must have regard to the skills, knowledge and experience needed for the effective administration of the CIO.



## Public Benefit

The Trustees have regard to the Charity Commission's public benefit guidance, taking this into account when exercising any powers or duties to which the guidance is relevant.

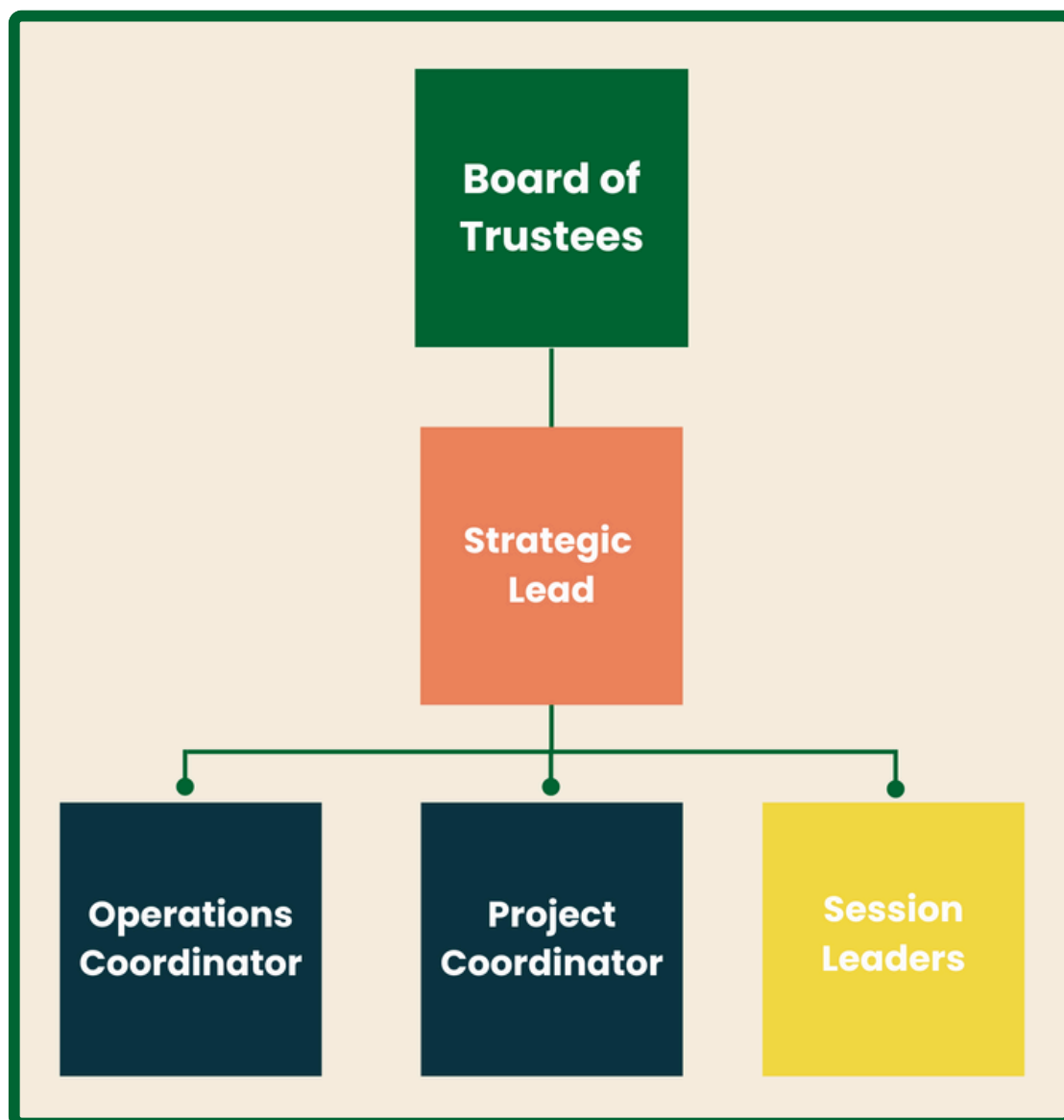
## Officers

ROAM's Executive officer during this period was Naomi Fisher, Strategic Lead.

Naomi's key responsibilities include:

- Strategic oversight of the charity's activities
- Business Planning
- Financial oversight and management
- Income and Fundraising
- Systems and data oversight
- Marketing and External Communications
- Campaigning and Events
- Partnerships: Corporate and emerging partnerships
- Designated Safeguarding Lead

## Organisational Structure



# 06 Financial Review

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## Review Statement

ROAM started the period with funding carried over from four grants received the previous year – including restricted funding from The Eveson Charitable Trust, The National Lottery Community Fund, Cotteridge Quaker Community Fund and the Heart of England Charitable Foundation.

Income for the period covered by this report totalled £24,896 of which £15,434 was restricted coming from four grants. Session delivery relating to these grants will be completed in 2024/25.

Expenditure in the period totalled £19,338.

## Income

ROAM's income has largely been in the form of grants from trusts other funding bodies – during the period the majority of this funding was for specific project delivery.

Moving forward, a more sustainable mixed model of income is to be developed, recognising that some activities the charity delivers could be charged to some consumers without detriment to the mission, vision or values. This includes schools or other organisations as well as individual families.

ROAM recognises that some of its pioneering work or projects with children who may stand to benefit most, may still be largely dependent upon external grant funders. That said, the opportunity for subsidising this through other work will be promoted in the form of voluntary donations for sessions (with tangible examples of what donations can help pay for), and profit on merchandising.



## Grants

- John Feeney Charitable Trust
- The Eveson Trust
- The Sir John Middlemore Charitable Trust
- Awards for All
- The Fitton Trust
- The W E Dunn Trust
- The Edgar E Lawley Foundation
- The Roughley Trust
- The Grantham Yorke Trust

## Donations

- During the period we ran a successful Crowdfunder campaign to continue running our Outdoor Playgroup in Cotteridge Park. This raised donations of £1,108.
- We also received £1,420 in individual donations.

## Commissions and Consultancy

In August 2023 we were commissioned to run ROAM Free in Manor Farm Park, raising an income of £250.

## Other Income: payments, merchandise

- To support our ROAM-IN Sessions we introduced 'Pay as you Feel' tickets, giving the option for families to make a donation towards the sessions – this raised £150.
- We received £84 for merchandise sales.

## Reserves Policy

Once a year the Board will consider the level of reserves that it is prudent for the organisation to hold. Consideration will be given to redundancy liabilities, lease agreements and any other significant factors that should be taken into account if the organisation were to close.

We will aim to build up reserves representing a minimum of 3 months of typical turnover by the end of Year 5 (April 2025).

Until we have built up adequate reserves, we have taken a low risk approach to taking on any liabilities including employment, leases, subscriptions or other regular commitments.

# 07a Accounts: Receipts & Payments Year End 31 March 2024

	Un-restricted funds (£)	Restricted Funds (£)	Total this year	Last year
<b>A1 Receipts</b>				
Booking receipts	150	-	<b>150</b>	-
Donations	2,528	-	<b>2,528</b>	941
Grant funding	6,450	15,434	<b>21,884</b>	25,897
Merchandise sales	84	-	<b>84</b>	177
Commissioned Work	250	-	<b>250</b>	400
<b>Subtotal (Gross income for AR)</b>	<b>9,462</b>	<b>15,434</b>	<b>24,896</b>	27,415
<b>A2 Asset and investment sales (see table)</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>Total Receipts</b>	<b>9,462</b>	<b>15,434</b>	<b>24,896</b>	27,415
<b>A3 Total Payments</b>				
Salaries – Freelancers	3,211	13,283	<b>16,494</b>	21,610
Session equipment	29	256	<b>285</b>	1,676
Session consumables	45	494	<b>539</b>	483
Computer costs	-	263	<b>263</b>	205
Professional services	275	720	<b>995</b>	573
Merchandise costs	97	-	<b>97</b>	-
Training	-	-	-	77
Insurance	-	538	<b>538</b>	324
Travel	-	-	-	33
Subsistence	6	-	<b>6</b>	22
DBS checks	-	46	<b>46</b>	222
Printing, postage and stationery	10	-	<b>10</b>	-
Online Payment Charges	65	-	<b>65</b>	-
Donations	-	-	-	100
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>3,738</b>	<b>15,600</b>	<b>19,338</b>	25,325
<b>A4 Asset and investment purchases (see table)</b>				
<b>Total Payments</b>	<b>3,738</b>	<b>15,600</b>	<b>19,338</b>	25,325
<b>Net of receipts/(payments)</b>	<b>5,724</b>	<b>(166)</b>	<b>5,558</b>	2,090
A5 Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-
A6 Cash funds last year end	<b>304</b>	<b>12,685</b>	<b>12,989</b>	10,898
<b>Cash Funds this year end</b>	<b>6,028</b>	<b>12,519</b>	<b>18,547</b>	12,988

## 07b Accounts: Statement of Assets & Liabilities for the period

	Details	Un-restricted funds (£)	Restricted Funds (£)
<b>B1 Cash Funds</b>	Bank Current Account	6,028	12,519
<b>Total Cash Funds</b>		<b>6,028</b>	<b>12,519</b>

<b>B2 Other Monetary Assets</b>	Stock of Merchandise	400	-
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	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
<b>B3 Investment Assets</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>B4 Assets Retained for the Charity's own use</b>	Equipment	Unrestricted	3,163	1,200
		Restricted	140	120

	Details	Fund to which liability relates	Amount due	When due (optional)
<b>B5 Liabilities</b>	Accrued Expenses	Unrestricted	1,510	-
		Restricted	1,330	

Signed by two trustees on behalf of all the trustees:

Signature		
Full Name	Laura Smiley	Geraldine Cole
Date	30th January 2025	30th January 2025



# 08 Reference & Administrative details

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## Charity Details

Charity name: ROAM

Registered charity number: 1190230

Charity's principal address:

10 Ashmore Road

BIRMINGHAM

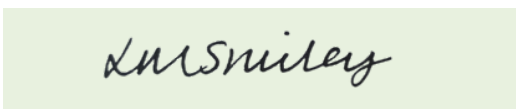
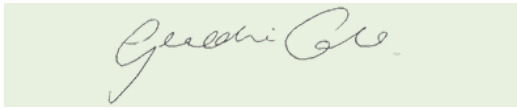
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# 09 Declarations

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This Annual Report, covering the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 was approved by trustees of ROAM on 28th November 2024.

Signed on behalf of the charity’s trustees:

Signature		
Full Name	Laura Smiley	Geraldine Cole
Position	Chair	Treasurer
Date	30th January 2025	30th January 2025