Charity Link 1876-2026

A (VERY!) brief history

29th May 1876

The first public meeting at the County Rooms (now The City Rooms), Leicester.

The principles of the charity were approved, a committee was appointed, and we were officially formed!

The County Rooms (1876)

1877

With three honorary secretaries and our first paid officer (Mr Henry Brice) we opened our first office at 39 Charles Street.

We helped with the short-term care of those recovering from illness and supporting the unemployed. Around 300 cases were handled during the year.

Also in 1876

Leicester Town Hall opened (on 7th August).

Tchaikovsky completed Swan Lake ballet.

The telephone was invented by Alexander Graham Bell.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn (Custer's Last Stand) took place.

1901

Queen Victoria dies.

1903

Mr William Hincks replaced Mr Brice as Secretary due to ill health. Over the next 34 years, Mr Hincks made us into one of most efficient organisations of its kind. He died in 1937.

Due to a rise in tuberculosis, a special fund was established to match individual subscribers with a patient, providing them with a small pension or special food.

1906

Government introduced state provisions to alleviate those in the worst distress but the need for LCOS's work remained vital.

Mr William Hincks

Leicester (1914)

1914

With the outbreak of war, we played a key role as the Town Council formed a Relief Committee to help alleviate the distress caused to families as low-wage earners enlisted.

1918

Spanish Flu epidemic.

1919

After the war, key issues were unemployment and a severe housing shortage.

We worked with the fund for discharged servicemen, set up by Sir Jonathan North, Leicester's Mayor during the war. We later worked with the British Legion to help ex-servicemen.

The Oriental Café, Leicester (1926)

Our 50th anniversary!

1926

A planned conference was cancelled due to the General Strike.

The following year, a dinner was held at the Oriental Café in the Market Place, with a reception in the Art Gallery, arranged lectures and excursions, and the Bishop of Leicester preached at a special Cathedral service.

WWII (1942)

1930s

High unemployment lead to huge need: our paperwork system collapsed!

Staffing levels increased, and we acted as an agent/administered for many funds, including for toys and dinners at Christmas and various regimental aid societies.

1940s

The outbreak of WWII saw a decrease in unemployment, and our focus turned to supporting servicemen's families. By the end of the war, we'd succeeded in arranging help or advice for 14,664 service families.

After the war, along with giving aid, advice services expanded, as many could not understand the entitlements of the New Acts of Parliament – including the Disabled Persons Employment Act (1944).

20-20a Millstone Lane, Leicester (Owen Hughes)

1960s

We acted on behalf of many additional charities and assisted the Leicestershire War Memorial Foundation in selecting tenants for its Scraptoft Memorial Homes.

We gave assistance to the T.S. Shipman Trust, the J.R. Corah Foundation and the Buttle Trust. and took over the administration of the Leicester Indigent Old-Age Society.

1970s

There was a greater focus on financial issues of the terminally ill, single-parent families, the growing costs of caring for the elderly, increasing fuel and heating costs, growth in mental illness and debt caused by high inflation, high-pressure advertising and readily-available credit.

Mother and child (1972)

1977

Having worked alongside the National Society for Cancer Relief (NSCR) since 1960, the idea of the Leicester Organisation for the Relief of Suffering (LOROS), was developed.

In 1977, LOROS's first home was at our office.

By 1981, after a successful fundraising campaign, the fledgling charity moved to its own offices.

1974

Our work expanded into the county of Leicestershire.

1976

No elaborate celebrations for our centenary year!

1980s

As we continued to adapt to current need, we opened our own Money Advice Centre (LMAC) and Debt Counselling Service – only the second of its kind in the country. It grew, and twenty years later became an independent charity.

We'd worked with The Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund for 20 years, and a new grant paid for a Welfare Rights/ Resource Worker to be based at our office to give advice and information to cancer patients, assisting them in accessing appropriate benefits. A training package for cancer care professionals was also produced.

Big IT developments took place to move from our largely paper-based processes at the time.

The modern era

2001

We modernised and changed our name to Leicester Charity Link, but our work did not change.

Leicester Charity Link

Tackling Poverty - Changing Lives

A new name and logo

2012

After identifying significant need, we expanded our work into Northamptonshire.

This resulted in our current name, 'Charity Link'

The Goods Depot (2019)

2019

Thanks to a Big Lottery grant, we launched our social enterprise, The Goods Depot, to provide goods for clients and organisations.

This continues to grow to provide a sustainable income stream for the charity.

2020

COVID pandemic.

2020

We remained open throughout the COVID pandemic, working to meet the increased need this presented.

The 'There with you fund' was created in partnership with Leicestershire Live and The Randal Charitable Foundation, and, from March 2020 to March 2021, we distributed over £850k of essential items.

2022

Sue McEniff, who joined the charity in 2008, was appointed CEO.

2024

Our long-standing Chairman, Clive Smith, stands down (but remains part of our dedicated Trustee Board) and hands the baton on to George Oliver.

The team welcomes HRH Duke of Gloucester to our office in September.

George Oliver becomes Chair

2025

With the support of the community, we distributed £1.2 million in grants, delivered 7,500 essential items and helped 4,500 people and children.

The tenth anniversary of our award-winning Leicestershire 3 Peaks Challenge

Our work remains vital

Today!

2026

We continue to innovate and develop our work to meet current need.

It – and your support – remains as vital as ever!