

# Public Document Pack

**Eildon**  
Area Partnership

**Our Scottish Borders**  
Your community

## Meeting

**Date:** Thursday, 8 September 2022  
**Time:** 6 pm  
**Location:** via MS Teams

All attendees, including members of the public, should note that the public business in this meeting will be livestreamed and video recorded and that recording will be available thereafter for public view for 180 days.

Those watching the event via the livestream will not be able to view the breakout room discussions listed at Item No. 4. Invitations to join the meeting can be obtained from Declan Hall, [Declan.Hall@scotborders.gov.uk](mailto:Declan.Hall@scotborders.gov.uk)

## AGENDA

1.	<b>Welcome and Meeting Protocols</b>
2.	<b>Feedback from Meeting of 30 June 2022</b> (Pages 3 - 12)  Copy Minute from Meeting held on 30 June 2022. (Copy attached.)  Menti Feedback from Meeting held on 30 June 2022. (Copy attached.)
	<b>Section 1: Service &amp; Partner Updates and Consultations</b>
3.	<b>Place Making - Progress Report</b>
	<b>Section 2: Local Priorities</b>
4.	<b>Climate Change - Local Action</b>  Input from Jenny Fausset, Climate Change Officer, and Louise Cox, Environment Strategy Co-ordinator followed by Breakout Room Discussions
	<b>Section 3: Community Empowerment and Community Funding</b>
5.	<b>Overview of Community Funding</b>  SBC Communities & Partnership Team.
6.	<b>Eildon Funding Table 2022/23</b> (Pages 13 - 14)  Eildon Locality Funding Table 2022/23, SBC Communities & Partnership Team. (Copy attached.)
7.	<b>Neighbourhood Support Fund</b> (Pages 15 - 16)

	<p>Eildon Assessment Panel to present funding recommendations for the following NSF applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Live Learn Earn</li> <li>• Channelkirk Primary School Parent Council</li> <li>• Stable Life</li> <li>• The Heartland Market</li> </ul> <p>(Copy attached.)</p>
8.	<p><b>Project Evaluation - Update/Presentation</b> (Pages 17 - 36)</p> <p>The Abbotsford Trust – BBBB Recovery Fund</p> <p>Short project evaluation followed by a request to the Area Partnership to keep unspent funds of £3,436. The Abbotsford Trust were awarded £15k on 11 November 2021 to deliver a pilot project focussing on the mental health and wellbeing of adults who have been affected by COVID-19.</p>
	<p><b>Section 4: Other</b></p>
9.	<p><b>Next Area Partnership - Thursday, 17 November 2022 at 6pm</b></p> <p>Agenda issued: Thursday, 03 November 2022.</p>
10.	<p><b>Any Other Business</b></p>
11.	<p><b>Public Forum</b></p>
12.	<p><b>Meeting Evaluation Via Menti</b></p>

Please direct any enquiries to Declan Hall Tel: 01835 826556  
Email: Declan.Hall@scotborders.gov.uk

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**Eildon  
Area Partnership**



MINUTE of Meeting of the EILDON AREA PARTNERSHIP held remotely by Microsoft Teams on Thursday, 30 June 2022 at 6.00 pm

Present:- Councillors E. Thornton-Nicol (Chair), C. Cochrane, L. Douglas, F. Sinclair, N. Mackinnon, and J. Paton-Day, together with 10 representatives of Partner Organisations, Community Councils, and members of the public.

Apologies:- Councillors D. Parker, E. Jardine and J. Linehan

Absent: Councillor H. Steel

In Attendance:- Community Co-ordinator (K. Harrow), Portfolio Manager (J. Lamb), Community Engagement Officer (E. Coltman), Youth Engagement Officer (P. Rigby), Democratic Services Officer (D. Hall)

**1. WELCOME AND MEETING PROTOCOLS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Eildon Area Partnership held remotely via Microsoft Teams, which included Elected Members, guests attending within the meeting and those watching via the Live Stream. The Chair outlined how the meeting would be conducted. The Chair introduced each of the Elected Members in turn.

**ORDER OF BUSINESS**

The Chair varied the order of business as shown on the agenda and the Minute reflects the order in which the items were considered at the meeting.

**2. FEEDBACK FROM MEETING OF 30 MARCH 2022**

The Minute of the meeting of the Eildon Area Partnership held on 30 March 2022 had been circulated and was noted. The Chair advised that with regards to the Menti Evaluation circulated with the Agenda, items listed would be assessed and considered at the meeting of the Area Partnership in September.

**3. PLACE MAKING - PROGRESS REPORT**

3.1 Portfolio Manager, James Lamb, gave a slide presentation providing an update on the Place Making Approach. Mr Lamb explained that he had been working on Place Making for over one year, and that two options were being considered for how to proceed with developing Place Making Plans. It was essential that Place Making plans were community-led, that efforts were made to be as inclusive as possible, and that every community was considered individually to reflect their needs and aspirations.

3.2 Regarding the necessity of plans, Mr Lamb explained that accessing funding was a key part of Place Making, and that ensuring a joined-up approach to thinking allowed communities to access the wide array of funding that was becoming available. Significantly, Place Making plans could help unlock funding streams by demonstrating the level of community support projects have, the business case of a project and demonstrate its deliverability. Fundamentally, Mr Lamb advised that Place Making was about ensuring that communities could come together and align their interests to ensure that through the effective use of resources and the capacity within that community, places were made better for people to live in.

3.3 Mr Lamb provided an overview of the approaches that different localities had considered. Within the five localities within the Scottish Borders, 26 communities had expressed an interest in Place Making. Berwickshire and Tweeddale had chosen to set up Working Groups to take forward Place Making. The aforementioned Area Partnerships had agreed to form a working group, develop the arrangements and co-ordinate Place Making within their locality. Within the Eildon locality, the initial communities of Galashiels, Langlee, Newtown St Boswells; Stow and Fountainhall, and Bannerfield had been identified. Subsequently, interest had been registered from Selkirk, with considerations being made to involve Selkirk and Bannerfield together. Mr Lamb proceeded to outline the Working Group proposals for proceeding with Place Making as circulated within the agenda pack. The Area Partnership unanimously agreed to proceed with the initial communities that had been developed. The Area Partnership unanimously agreed to proceed with the Working Group approach as defined within the document circulated with the agenda. Further discussions clarified that additional communities were welcome to get involved with Place Making, and that officer support would be available to seek expressions of interest from those who wished to get involved in the working group.

#### 4. **PROJECT EVALUATION - SELKIRK BAPTIST CHURCH**

The Chair invited Heather Neilson to provide a presentation on work that had gone on following the award of funding from the Build Back a Better Borders Recovery Fund to the Selkirk Baptist Church. The Church had applied for, and received funding of approximately £7k, to redevelop a garden area at the rear of the church. The garden had been in a neglected state prior to the work, but had been transformed into a significant asset, with three tiers present within the garden with a range of features including a pergola, rock garden and water feature. The garden was used as a community asset, with a range of groups and individuals using the space to meet and host events. Those in attendance expressed their delight in seeing the transformation, remarked that the project was inspiring and encouraged Ms Neilson to publicise and circulate her group's success using social media.

#### 5. **THE NATIONAL LOTTERY - COMMUNITY FUNDING**

Neal Bennison of the National Lottery joined the meeting to provide insight into his group and an overview of how they could help with community funding. Mr Bennison explained that he worked as a National Lottery Community Fund Manager, focused on helping communities access funding. The National Lottery had, in the last financial year, provided approximately £1.3 million to projects across the Scottish Borders via small grants of between £10k and £200k. Mr Bennison highlighted that his organisation shared a lot in common with the approach of Place-Making, namely that the group would look to try and co-ordinate a connected approach, pull a range of groups together to optimise their strengths and build on existing assets. Mr Bennison shared his contact details and advised any interested party to contact him as early as possible when considering making an application for funding.

#### 6. **FINANCIAL INCLUSION FUND / FOOD CONVERSATION**

Mr Harrow, Community Co-ordinator, provided an overview of work that had gone on within Eildon looking to improve financial inclusion and provide food support. Mr Harrow explained that the Financial Inclusion Fund had been made available by the Scottish Government, and that the funding was used to tackle food insecurity, provide welfare payments directly to households and fuel cards to those who experiencing fuel poverty. Regarding food support, Mr Harrow explained that a trial "Low and Slow" project had taken place in Hawick, but that a new project would start in approximately 2 weeks. The project brought together NHS Borders, Gala Foodbank, Changeworks and the Focus Centre. 8 individuals were taking part initially, with a view to developing childcare facilities to allow a roll-out to a wider group of people in the future. With regards to Food Conversations, Mr Harrow explained that a group would be formed that would be action focused, with each session having key actions or targets to make a real difference. In response to questions Mr Harrow explained that his team were seeing more and more

people struggling with the cost of living, and that work was ongoing to try and improve communication to encourage people to come forward for help. With regards to providing food vouchers, Mr Harrow explained that people in crisis could get in contact through an SBC contact centre or directly get in touch with Mr Harrow, or his colleague Mr Coltman, who could arrange supermarket gift card vouchers to be provided. The Chair highlighted an SBC leaflet that outlined support available specifically within the Eildon locality, encouraging any organisation that sent out food parcels or support to get in touch. Mr Coltman encouraged any interested party to contact him, and that he could provide them with copies of the leaflet. Pam Rigby, Youth Engagement Worker with SBC, encouraged Young People to sign up to the membership benefits that come in conjunction with a Young Scot Card.

## **MEMBER**

Councillor MacKinnon left during the discussion of the item above.

### **7. OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY FUNDING**

Mr Coltman, Community Engagement Officer, introduced himself to the meeting and provided insight into his work as part of the Communities and Partnerships Team. Mr Coltman explained that he was always interested in speaking to groups, organisations or individuals in the voluntary sector or beyond to help co-ordinate and assist work that can help local communities. Previous projects and highlights were shown to the meeting, and Mr Coltman encouraged people to get in touch if they were seeking help on any community projects.

### **8. EILDON FUNDING TABLES**

The main source of funding available this financial year, as a replacement for the Community Fund, was the Neighbourhood Support Fund. The Fund had opened with a balance of £147K, with £145.5k remaining following the approval of smaller, fast-track applications. Mr Coltman explained that the fund would run until it was depleted or until the end of the financial year.

### **9. NEIGHBOURHOOD SUPPORT FUND**

9.1 Jenny Mushlin, Chair of the Eildon Assessment Panel, gave an outline of each application before providing comments and an explanation of the reason for each recommendation. One application was deferred whilst the Panel sought further information.

#### **9.2 Works+**

The application from Works+ was for £3.5k to help deliver two, 20-week courses for up to 20 women in the Eildon locality. The funding would help support staff costs, pay for rent, travel, refreshments and materials for workshops. The Panel recommended that the application was approved, which was unanimously agreed.

#### **9.3 Go Wild Scotland**

The application from Go Wild Scotland was for £14,790.60 for salary costs for one full-time staff member to deliver a new project that would help community groups throughout the Eildon locality to create a "digital trail", combining physical and digital elements. Trail users could use phones or other smart devices to access digital resources by scanning tags to gain access to a range of resources. In response to a question regarding leases for the use of land being used, assurances were provided that safeguards would be put in place to ensure the continuity of the trails following their development. The recommendation of the funding Panel was unanimously approved.

## **DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Councillor Sinclair declared an interest in the following item of business in terms of Section 5 of the Councillors Code of Conduct and left the Meeting during the discussion.

### **9.4 Gala Rugby (Maroon'd)**

The application from Gala Rugby was for £12.5k to deliver the second Maroon'd event at Netherdale on 20 August 2022. The event was planned as a sporting and social event featuring rugby from primary school and high school ages up to senior sevens level. Clan rugby was also included. The event would also include a further range of sporting events, including athletics, football, and a range of live entertainment and food. The event was planned to be free entry, with a shuttle bus running to the town centre. The funding applied for would cover the provision of security staff, portable toilets and showers, marquees for changing and music costs. Ms Mushlin explained that the Panel had recommended to fund the project this year, but was reluctant to continually fund future iterations of the event. Members in attendance unanimously agreed in principle with the recommendation for the funding, but lacking a Member from each of the Wards within the Eildon locality, were not quorate. The decision was therefore subject to future ratification.

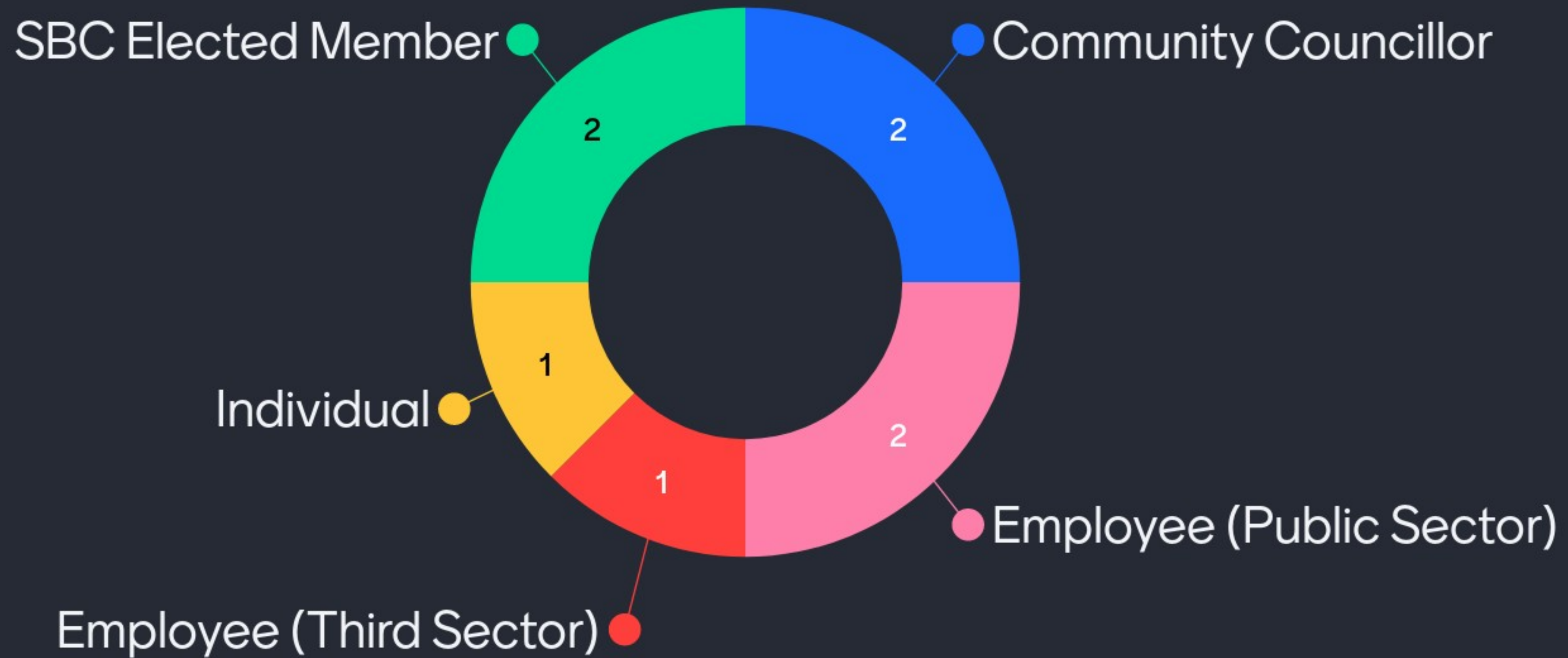
10. **NEXT AREA PARTNERSHIP**

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday 8 September 2022. Suggestions for agenda items could be sent to the Community and Partnerships team.

***The meeting concluded at 7.40 pm***

# Eildon Area Partnership Evaluation

# In which role do you attend Eildon Area Partnership meetings?





# Had you attended an Eildon Area Partnership meeting before this evening?



# Please rank the agenda items in order of interest and/or importance to you



# Which topics would you like to see covered at future Area Partnership meetings?

More information on how we can tackle cost of living within Eildon

Sustainable Development/Climate Emergency update

Would like to know more about Climate and what the new officer will be involved in and can they be involved in Area Partnerships

Community food growing /food sharing updates

What is a community interest company and a social enterprise

Environmental and open space funding

Tourism strategy - good point to review after summer.

Youth engagement - we need to improve Eildon Youth Area Partnership perhaps

If not always on agenda a presentation from all relevant groups who have completed or made significant progress at that time of how the money has been spent. Loved watching the Baptist church garden journey.

# Do you have any further questions or comments?

A good length of meeting

No

No

The format works quite well. A face to face meeting would be a refreshing change. It would be good to see more community councillors involved.

No

## Eildon Funding 2022/23

08 September 2022

Neighbourhood Support Fund (NSF) 2022/23	
	£
Opening balance as of 01/04/2022	£ 147,038.24
<b>Plus Local Festival Grant Underspend 2021/22</b>	£ 890.00
<b>Total available</b>	<b>£ 147,928.24</b>
<b>Less:</b>	
NSF applications awarded since 01/04/2022	£ 34,055.87
NSF applications that are assessed and await decision	£ 31,474.00
Sub-total	£ 65,529.87
<b>Funds remaining if assessed applications are successful</b>	<b>£ 82,398.37</b>
NSF applications still to be assessed	£ 15,000.00
<b>Potential Overall Position</b>	<b>£ 67,398.37</b>

Other sources of grant funding - Eildon			
Grant Type	Available	Awarded	Remaining
Local Festival Grants	£ 28,400.00	£ 12,050.00	<b>£ 16,350.00</b>
Annual Support Grants (Community Councils)	£ 10,525.00	£ 2,895.00	<b>£ 7,630.00</b>
SBC Small Schemes	£ 96,400.00	£ 29,278.00	<b>£ 67,122.00</b>
Common Good (Galashiels)	£ 500.00	£ -	<b>£ 500.00</b>
Common Good (Lauder)	£ 10,500.00	£ 1,121.40	<b>£ 9,378.60</b>
Common Good (Selkirk)	£ 20,650.00	£ 2,500.00	<b>£ 18,150.00</b>
William Hill Trust	£ 5,700.00	£ 2,540.00	<b>£ 3,160.00</b>
SBC Enhancement Trust	£ 3,047.22	£ -	<b>£ 3,047.22</b>
SBC Welfare Trust	£ 9,501.52	£ -	<b>£ 9,501.52</b>
	<b>£ 185,223.74</b>	<b>£ 50,384.40</b>	<b>£ 134,839.34</b>

Summary of applications						
No.	Date	Fund	Organisation Name	Amount	Project	Status
1	05/04/2022	N'Hood Support	Lauderdale Scout Group	£ 1,500.00	Composting toilet	Awarded
2	08/04/2022	N'Hood Support	Selkirk Guiding	£ 115.27	100 year celebratory event	Awarded
3	13/04/2022	N'Hood Support	Go Wild Scotland	£ 14,790.60	Salary costs - Digital Trail Rollout	Awarded
4	29/04/2022	N'Hood Support	Works+	£ 3,500.00	Salary costs	Awarded
5	16/05/2022	N'Hood Support	Newstead Village Community Trust	£ 390.00	Admin & newsletter costs	Awarded
6	06/05/2022	N'Hood Support	Gala Rugby	£ 12,500.00	Maroon'd event costs	Awarded
7	31/05/2022	N'Hood Support	Live, Learn, Earn CIC	£ 11,550.00	Selkirk Community Garden Art project	Assessed
8	02/06/2022	N'Hood Support	The Lavender Touch	£ 1,260.00	Treatment room	Awarded
9	28/07/2022	N'Hood Support	Channelkirk PS Parent Council	£ 5,616.00	Transport to Lauder Out-of-School Club	Assessed
10	01/08/2022	N'Hood Support	Stable Life	£ 15,000.00	Salary costs	Assessing
11	10/08/2022	N'Hood Support	Oxton Community Development Ltd	£ 948.00	Oxton shop development project	Assessed
12	16/08/2022	N'Hood Support	The Heartland Market	£ 13,360.00	Galashiels market stalls	Assessed
<b>Total</b>				<b>£ 80,529.87</b>		

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### **Eildon Assessment Panel Recommendations**

Neighbourhood Support Fund 2022/23

#### **Live Learn Earn**

£11,550.00

Selkirk Community Garden Art Project will be a cross-generational initiative to create artistically designed practical pieces within Selkirk High School Horticultural and Selkirk Community Shed garden areas. A consultant would be commissioned to provide metalworking skills to attendees who would design and produce the pieces themselves. Marginalised pupils would be selected to take part.

#### Panel thoughts:

- The consultancy fees are very high and the panel feel that the outcomes of the project do not justify such a significant rate of pay.
- 12-14 young people would be involved in the project per term.
- The intergenerational element of the project is valuable.
- It might be possible to provide metalworking training through Borders College. This should be investigated.
- This project is aimed at a relatively small group of high school pupils and may not be of significant benefit to the wider community.

An application could be submitted if the high consultancy costs were revisited and there was stronger evidence of the wider community benefit.

**The Panel recommends not to fund this project.**

### **Channelkirk Primary School Parent Council**

£5,616.00

To address the lack of after-school childcare at Channelkirk Primary School, the proposal is to provide a free transport service between Channelkirk and Lauder Primary School, during term time, allowing the children to attend Lauder Out-of-School Club. Peter Hogg of Jedburgh would be able to operate the service between one of their Earlston School runs, which would reduce the cost to £108 per day. This is a pilot project.

#### Panel thoughts:

- The project has been very well researched with a survey of parents/wider community.
- It will help working parents and encourage them to send children to Channelkirk Primary School.
- It is important to do everything possible for children to enable them to take part in a wide range of activities with others.

**Recommended to fund - £5,616.00**

**Stable Life**

£15,000.00

Stable Life will deliver a structured programme for at least 100 referred young people (51% from the Eildon Area) which will include Equine Assisted Therapy/Learning, riding lessons and psychosocial based interventions. They will also offer transitional work placements for young people who would normally struggle in traditional work situations and volunteering opportunities for children they have supported as well as the wider community. The application is towards project workers' salaries.

**The Panel have deferred the decision regarding this project to the next Eildon Area Partnership meeting in order to request further information.**

**The Heartland Market**

£13,360.00

To purchase 20 market stalls to ensure the monthly market (started in March 2022) can continue to run. Currently the stalls are rented but this is not proving to be financially viable. If owned, the Community Interest Company would give access to the stalls to any charity or groups in Galashiels. The CIC would build an easy to use website to manage bookings and would promote the stalls as a community asset, managing the storage, bookings and maintenance.

Panel thoughts:

- The monthly market has proved to be popular and should continue.
- Galashiels needs initiatives like this, which will energise the town.
- This is an excellent way for people in Galashiels to find out about local community groups and charities.
- This is of benefit to the whole community.

**Recommend to fund - £13,360.00**





# THRIVE project

## Final report

July 2022



Build Back a Better  
Borders Recovery Fund

## Summary

**THRIVE was a pilot project focused on wellbeing, employability and improved mental health which ran at Abbotsford, the home of Sir Walter Scott near Melrose, from November 2021 – July 2022, led by our Heritage Engagement team. The project supports local people who have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.**

Working in partnership with the Local Area Co-ordination (LAC) – Mental Health team at Scottish Borders Council, the THRIVE project was aimed at adults who have engaged with the service to participate in weekly group activities on site at Abbotsford. The LAC team support adults who have acknowledged mental health difficulties that are affecting their quality of life.

The THRIVE pilot project was led by Mary Kenny, Heritage Engagement Officer (HEO) with support from the Local Area Co-ordination team, Abbotsford staff (including her line manager Dr Sandra Mackenzie, Heritage Engagement Manager) and a small group of Abbotsford volunteers who assisted with the project. The project was kindly funded by the Scottish Borders Council *Build Back a Better Borders Recovery Fund*.

The project involved group activities that took place each week at Abbotsford in 7-week blocks, with three places available per block (12 places available in total over the course of the whole project). The group focused on a different work area within Abbotsford each week, giving participants an insight into each work area and hands-on experience through a range of taster activities. These activities were developed in collaboration with staff and included hands-on practical activities in the gardens and estate, front-of-house activities in the historic house and visitor centre, 'behind the scenes' activities such as digital marketing and visitor interpretation and creative and storytelling activities.

The THRIVE pilot project gave participants the opportunity to improve their physical and mental health and develop life skills, for example: communication skills and timekeeping; building structure and focus into their week; gaining an insight into their own local heritage and jobs in the tourism sector; and gaining experience of short-term volunteering in preparation for a longer-term volunteering opportunity at Abbotsford or elsewhere.

The project has been a huge success and has been very well received by our local community participants, our project partner (the LAC Mental Health Team at Scottish Borders Council), Abbotsford Trust staff and members of our volunteer team. Throughout the programme, we have tracked the progress of our participants, from their hopes and aspirations at the outset to the cumulative impact of the experience at the end of the project and then further down the line one month after finishing. Their feedback demonstrates the immense value our participants have derived from the experience and how this is contributing to improved mental health and wellbeing.

## **Outcomes of the pilot project - number of participants**

Over the last 6 months, the project has engaged with 11 adults (18+) living in the Eildon area<sup>1</sup> who live with acknowledged mental health difficulties that are affecting their quality of life and have been affected by the impact of Covid-19.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst we engaged with a lower number of people than we'd originally suggested in our funding application, we learned that each person needed far more individual attention, staff time and reassurance about social distancing and group numbers to be comfortable and able to participate. As the feedback demonstrates, this approach guaranteed a high-quality experience for participants.

As a first experience of this type of work with a particularly vulnerable group, our staff now feel more informed, confident and skilled. We believe we have developed our capability to scope, deliver and manage community engagement activity targeted to those receiving support with mental health needs, but we are aware there is much more to learn.

In terms of further impact and volunteering, the project has also successfully supported 2 adults to actively volunteer within their communities and encouraged a further 5 to consider volunteering as a viable option for them in the near future.<sup>3</sup> As the feedback again demonstrates, many people had never considered volunteering as an activity open to them or had no knowledge of the sorts of voluntary roles available in settings such as Abbotsford. This project has offered a stepping stone to those who have felt marginalised and isolated and enabled them to see the value in volunteering, both for themselves and also for charities who rely on voluntary support.

## **Partnership working**

This project has been made possible through a new partnership between the Abbotsford Trust and the Local Area Coordination (LAC) Mental Health Team at Scottish Borders Council.

The LAC team works with adults aged 18 years and over who have acknowledged mental health difficulties that are affecting their quality of life. The team works across the Scottish Borders with a focus on supporting people to be part of their local community. The team supports clients to:

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<sup>1</sup> One participant lives in the Cheviot area and was invited to take part as one block had an available space which could not be filled by an Eildon resident.

<sup>2</sup> With the support of the LAC team, all 12 places were filled over the course of four blocks. However, one participant signed up for block 2 but then struggled to attend due to a long-awaited medical appointment and then falling ill with Covid. The participant was able to take a place on the next block. As the other two participants had already started, the LAC and HEO agreed that recruiting and introducing another person into the block would be disruptive for the clients already involved and may actually discourage them from continuing. Despite the challenges of Covid, we retained 11 participants over the course of the project which is an indication of success as many of the participants are living with personal challenges and lifestyles which can be chaotic.

<sup>3</sup> This relates to 7 participants who took part in blocks 1 – 3 only. We are awaiting the LAC's feedback in August to determine the outcomes of Block 4.

- think about what matters to them
- increase their social connections
- make links to community opportunities and services that may be of interest and beneficial to them
- identify opportunities to use their skills in the community
- build confidence and resilience to manage their health condition
- improve their physical and mental health
- become a more active member of their local community

The new offer was publicised to clients through the LAC and participants recruited. This referral-style method of engaging with local people as individuals required close partnership working with the LAC and an agreed timescale and recruitment pipeline to identify, recruit, induct and start new participants on each block.

If required, the LAC accompanied participants for the first couple of sessions on site and then withdrew over the course of the block when the client was ready and with the agreement of Abbotsford staff. The LAC also provided support and advice to the HEO during the planning and delivery phases of the project, particularly around approaches to group working, confidentiality and boundary-setting, support techniques and an agreed approach to evaluation.

The project also engaged 4 members of Abbotsford's existing volunteer team and 6 staff members who were instrumental in the delivery of specific activities and providing an inclusive 'safe space' in which vulnerable people could feel welcome and supported. Their contribution to the project has been highlighted within the participants' feedback as a particularly valuable aspect of the project, as the stigma around mental health is still sadly a common problem.

## **Aims**

In terms of external stakeholders, the project aimed to give local community participants the opportunity to:

- improve their physical and mental health
- become a more active member of their local community
- build structure and focus into their week
- re-build confidence, resilience and self-esteem
- further develop life skills such as timekeeping, communication skills and resilience
- gain an insight into their own local heritage and make a valuable contribution and connection to an internationally significant heritage site
- become familiar with the facilities available at Abbotsford (e.g. the free-to-access path network) and confidence to access these independently to support wellbeing
- gain experience of short-term volunteering in preparation for a more committed volunteering opportunity at Abbotsford or elsewhere
- gain an insight into careers and jobs within the tourism sector on their doorstep

In terms of internal stakeholders, the project aimed to:

- upskill Heritage Engagement staff by developing our knowledge and understanding of wellbeing and mental health through training and learning ‘on the job’
- give staff the opportunity to experiment and test new approaches to work with this audience and their specific needs
- proactively engage volunteers and staff with the project, with the aim to reduce the stigma around mental health and ‘open up the conversation’ around mental health and wellbeing
- create a new partnership between Abbotsford and our local NHS mental health services, extending our reach to their clients and providing Abbotsford staff with access to professional advice, support and feedback from the mental health team during the development and delivery phases

## **Project design**

The Heritage Engagement Officer (HEO) has worked hard to design an offer geared towards informing, empowering and supporting people living within our local community with acknowledged mental health needs, whilst realising the potential of Abbotsford’s natural and built heritage as a focus for meaningful wellbeing and employability-focused activity.

Rather than simply using Abbotsford as a beautiful backdrop for general therapeutic activity, the THRIVE project looked to actively engage participants with different work areas and the people who contribute to the functioning of a busy heritage attraction. We aimed to give participants an insight into the role of voluntary support and employment in readiness for volunteering or working themselves.

The project began with a development and design phase (November – early December 2021) and the delivery phase began with the first block in mid-December 2021. Four blocks were delivered in total. Activities took place on Tuesdays from 10.30am-1.30pm on site at Abbotsford.

At the suggestion of the LAC, the HEO built in an additional familiarisation week before each block began, increasing each block to 7 weeks rather than 6 weeks. This familiarisation visit allowed the LAC to accompany any participant that required support to travel to the site, meet staff, tour the facilities and find out more about the planned activities and approach. This was a crucial exercise for building participant confidence and addressing any fears or concerns. With the Christmas break falling during block 1 and the increase to 7 week blocks, the project ran on after the May grant deadline and finished on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2022.

As we identified suitable activities, went through an internal planning phase with managers and further consulted the LAC team, we were concerned that the number of places we had originally hoped to accommodate were possibly too ambitious for a pilot project with this audience’s needs and concerns. The emergence of new Covid-19 variants was a live issue

during the first part of the project in the winter months and our participants subsequently told us they were particularly anxious about this and some were worried about being in larger groups.

From previous experience, our staff also felt that a good supportive group dynamic could be better facilitated with a smaller number of participants, giving everyone the opportunity to contribute, speak and potentially share some very difficult feelings and personal challenges in a safe environment.

Whilst our staff felt confident about the project and our skills, we are conscious that we are not trained mental health professionals and had had no prior training in this area. With support from the LAC, the HEO was careful to steer the project and maintain focus on the tasks at hand, rather than providing a peer-to-peer support group for example. Mutual support was a feature of the project (as is strongly evident in the feedback), but the focus was outward-looking and engaged in something new and active in the participants' lives.

As part of the project, both the HEO and the Heritage Engagement Manager attended a short training course on Mental Health Improvement and Prevention of Suicide through Borders Care Voice, a local provider. This was extremely helpful, but only the very tip of the iceberg, and we have subsequently explored the availability and scope of Mental Health First Aid training through Borders College. Both the HEO and the Heritage Engagement Manager feel this training would be a crucial next step in building our confidence, knowledge and capability to deliver this sort of creative approach with vulnerable adults.

## **Activities**

The activities focused on a different department each week, giving participants an insight into each work area and hands-on experience through a range of taster activities such as:

- hands-on practical activities in the gardens and estate
- front-of-house activities in the historic house and visitor centre
- 'behind the scenes' activities such as digital marketing and visitor interpretation
- creative and storytelling activities

The exact focus and scheduling of the sessions followed the seasons and the work objectives of each department. The programme below is illustrative of our approach:

### **Week 1 - Visitor Services**

In this session the group worked in the Visitor Centre focusing on retail. With support from one of our Visitor Services volunteers, the group unpacked, checked, and displayed goods. The group then had coffee at Ochiltrees Café and had a meeting with the Trust's Volunteer Coordinator who explained more about volunteering at Abbotsford and our application process. The group was then able to have a 'behind the scenes' look at the Santa's Grotto commercial event which was being installed for the first time within the Visitor Centre. Back in the Bothy (our creative space within the gardens which served as a base for the group) the group undertook a creative activity which looked at hopes and choices for future wellbeing.



*Great. Happy, confident – would do this more. Proud.*

## Week 2 – Historic House and Collections



In this session the group focused on interpretation of certain objects in the Abbotsford collection. The group met and worked with one of our volunteer Guides and our Collections Officer to explore what visitor interpretation is in place at Abbotsford, why we provide this and what stories and information the Trust aims to impart. The group then used quill pens to interpret objects they had chosen from the collection as information cards, choosing to write in the form of acrostic poems.

*Really enjoyed today's session and meeting such interesting people that I have things in common with...*

### Week 3 - Walled Gardens

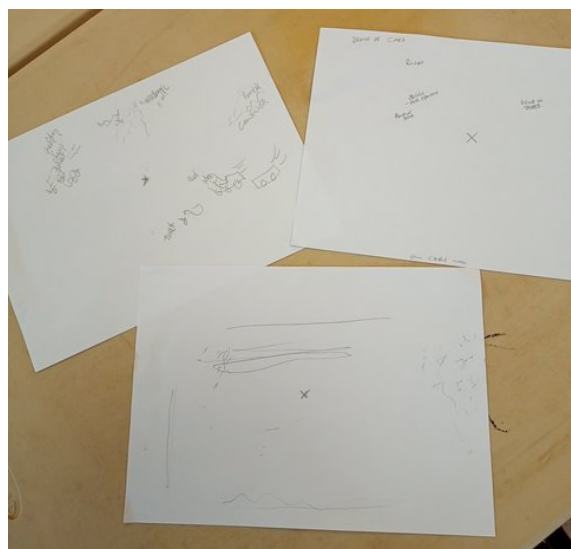


This week the group focused on our outdoor spaces and spent time exploring and getting hands-on with a specific area of the formal Walled Gardens called the Herb Border. The group worked with the Head Gardener and Gardens volunteers to renovate the border by cutting back dead plants and potting up strawberries and herbs which had overgrown their place.

*Great. I really did enjoy this activity.*

### Week 4 - Woodland and Estate

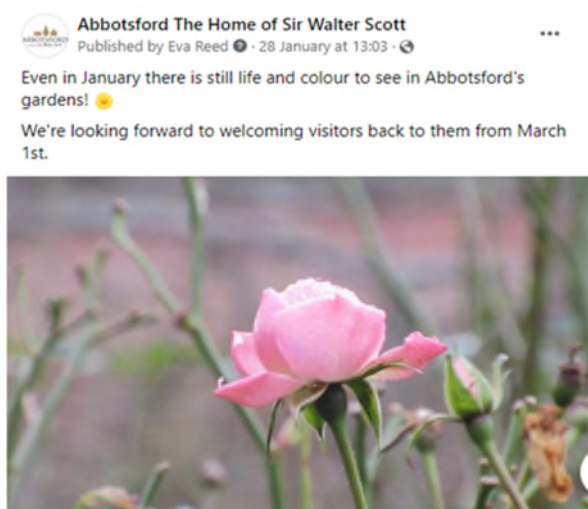
In this session, the group walked the paths network with a volunteer path warden, cleared culverts and picked litter whilst they found out more about this voluntary role. The group also met the Estate Ranger and found out about her work focusing on the biodiversity of the Abbotsford estate, access and maintenance. The group also discovered Sir Walter Scott's love for the outdoors and the struggles he experienced with depression and stress and the creation of his estate as a place of refuge and sanctuary. For the creative activity, the group took part in sensory activities in the woods including making a sound map.



*Informative and practical examples of the job. Good discussion of the various roles. Resources given for contemplation uplifting.*



## Week 5 - Marketing



In this session, the group met and worked with the Trust's Marketing Officer to explore how the Trust uses social media to share and publicise the Abbotsford offer online. The group took photographs of on-going conservation work in the historic house and the latest developments in the gardens, produced suitable copy with guidance from the Marketing Officer and created three social media posts which were subsequently published on Abbotsford's Facebook page.

*Great day with the cameras getting behind the scenes of the conservation effort*

## Week 6 - Round-up, reflect and celebrate

This week's activities were focused around the Celtic celebration of Imbolc - the return of the light, and new beginnings. The group heard a traditional story about snowdrops and got hands-on planting up sweet pea seeds for the coming season in the walled garden. The group reflected on the THRIVE sessions, discussed and collected feedback and celebrated the end of the project.



*Made me feel like I could be part of a team working environment again, instead of being 'solo'*

## Outcomes - feedback from participants and support staff



At the project design stage, the HEO worked closely with the Heritage Engagement Manager and the LAC to design an evaluation method which was practical to deliver and focused on measuring the impact of the experience both on a short-term basis and a longer-term basis.

We were very conscious that participants were being referred to us by an external statutory mental health service. We understood that the majority of clients experience ongoing issues with anxiety, depression and PTSD and receive support from a clinical team in the community. Each client is therefore on a much bigger on-going journey with their mental health and we took our responsibilities towards them very seriously.

We needed to produce evidence of the impact of the project, but to manage this in a way that was client-centred and supportive of each client's wellbeing and management of their condition.

With guidance from the LAC, the HEO implemented the following evaluation structure:

- **Aims** – at the outset of each 7 week block, participants were provided with a set of aims and asked to indicate which ones they felt applied to them. This took place in person at Abbotsford.
- **Daily check-in** – before each weekly session on site began each participant was asked to rate how they were feeling that day using a standard questionnaire and encouraged to share their status with the rest of the group if they felt able.
- **End of the block** – at the end of the block, participants were asked to return to the same aims they had considered at the outset and to rate the impact of the project.
- **One month after completion** – in order to gauge longer-term impact, the LAC had a scheduled telephone call with each participant one month after the completion

of their block and used set questions based on the aims to guide a reflective conversation. A written table of feedback was then passed onto us from the LAC.

### **Feedback from participants**

9 of our 11 participants provided feedback at the outset of the project and again at the end – a return rate of 82%.

### **Aims**

At the outset of each block, participants were asked what they aimed to get out of the project:

100% of our respondents hoped to meet new people.

89% of the respondents hoped to gain local knowledge, increase their confidence and their wellbeing.

78% hoped to achieve personal goals, gain volunteering experience and increase their employability.

### **Outcomes**

By the end of the project, 89% of our respondents had gained **volunteering experience**:

*Good reassurance that volunteering isn't just 'working for free'*

*This course has offered a head start to any new volunteers getting to know the place – if even 2 people become volunteers it's a lot of long-term manpower*

*I had not volunteered before this but may in future*

*Overall enjoyed learning about Abbotsford as an organisation and how it ran. I learned volunteers are crucial*

*Pleasantly surprised how everyone gets along and smooth communications between volunteers and staff and a sense of calm from people*

89% agreed they had **met new people** and **gained more local knowledge**. Only one person felt they had not gained more local knowledge. This could be that the individual already felt well-informed and had sought the project for other purposes.

*It was good to meet Mary and the other clients*

*Being afforded the opportunity to take part in [the] THRIVE project has been a genuinely enjoyable experience. Getting to see behind the scenes in various aspects of the organisation and the estate itself is exciting and truly interesting*

*Got me seeing other places*

*That there is lots of place[s] to go to*

*Being involved with others*

78% reported that the project had **increased their confidence**:

*Talking and sharing in subjects I hardly ever get to share with anyone about has lifted my confidence and excitement at potentially doing more with my knowledge here at Abbotsford in the future*

*Just helped to feel part of society*

78% also felt they had **achieved personal goals** with two people unsure if they had achieved personal goals:

*Thank you so very much Mary and all at Abbotsford. I am painting again. It is the most important thing in my life!*

*It let me see that I can go to things by myself and fill my head with outdoor stuff rather than my day-to-day stuff*

*Trying new things was weird, but it was ok, to try it*

On the question of **increased wellbeing**, we received a more mixed response, with the majority agreeing the project had had a positive impact on their wellbeing (55%), 2 people

unsure what impact it had had on their wellbeing (22%), 1 person who felt it had not increased their wellbeing (11%) and one person who declined to respond (11%).

This mixed response could be attributed to any number of external factors in the participants' lives and should not necessarily be viewed as a weakness on the part of the project. However, we note that this term has become a 'buzzword' in recent years and is therefore open to subjective interpretation. For future work in this area, the Trust would benefit from drilling into the meaning of this word more thoroughly and setting out our meaning more clearly.

*It was so much fun doing the paths and spending time outside*

*I enjoyed being outside but feeling useful and contributing something*

44% felt they had **increased their employability** with 44% feeling unsure about this and one person declining to answer. As above, 'employability' is a buzzword and can refer to practical skills, life skills such as timekeeping, confidence, workplace knowledge and lots of other factors. The ultimate proof of this impact would be whether the experience of the pilot project supports participants to perform better in their current employment and/or feel more confident about looking for work or more informed about different career options in the longer-term.

*Made me feel like I could be part of a teamworking environment again,  
instead of being 'solo'*

*I had built up lots of doubts about going back- experiences of negative  
working environment*

### **Mental health and wellbeing outcomes**

We also asked our respondents to reflect further on their mental health and wellbeing and to consider if participating in the project had made a positive contribution to their overall mental health.

In terms of **self-confidence and self-esteem**, 100% agreed the project had a positive impact.

*I just want to say thank you for all you done that I really enjoyed it. It was a good feeling to do something different that I have not experienced before. I feel that it has helped me with my confidence which is a big thing to me. Thank you.*

**Depression and/or anxiety** was a common issue for all participants, with 78% agreeing that the project had had a positive impact on their experience of these on-going issues with 22% unsure.

*Help me to meet other people with kind of same situations*

*It was so much fun doing the paths and spending time outside*

*I now go out more*

As part of the set of questions exploring the impact of the project on overall mental health we again asked our participants if the pilot project had **improved their wellbeing**. 67% felt it had made an improvement, 22% were unsure and only one person felt it had not. As above, this may be for any number of external reasons.

*Getting mind off problems helps*

*The THRIVE project has definitely helped me step outside of my difficulties and routines, if only briefly, and shown me there is much I can contribute to, and offered support, sympathy and a shot of confidence which is genuinely appreciated*

We also asked our participants how the project had helped them to **address their concerns around Covid-19**. We knew from initial discussions with the LAC that the pandemic had made things much worse for many people living with a mental health condition by increasing their social isolation as normal activities and contact with others was restricted, thereby increasing loneliness and anxiety.

The feedback indicates that 33% felt that the project had helped to address their concerns, 33% were unsure if it had, 22% felt it had not and one person declined to answer. As highlighted above, worries about contracting Covid-19 and self-isolation were a high priority for many participants in the project:

*I personally think it was a good amount of people*

*Holistically enjoyed the experience and recommend to others. I found the small group better*

*The small group. I was expecting a much larger group which worried me initially*

*Got me out and about and wasn't crowded*

Overall, 78% of our respondents said that they had had an **excellent experience** and 22% said that they had had a **good experience**.

When asked how they felt about the environment in which the project took place and whether they felt safe and welcome, respondents told us:

*Yes, very welcoming and listening to some wildlife to and from bus stop*

*Yes, especially the Bothy- very ambient- feel like I'm in a book!*

*Wood building more relaxing than an office environment*

*Yes. This can be a worry- who will you be on the course with*

*Very much so and Mary Kenny and other staff were very welcoming*

When asked if they would recommend the project to others:

*Definitely with help understanding to get there and back from the Lacs Teams*

*Yes. Definitely!*

*I already have!*

*Yes 100%*

### **Feedback from Local Area Coordinator, SBC Mental Health Team**

Through scheduled telephone calls, the LAC reflected on the project with the participants one month after completion of their block of activity.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of **improved physical and mental health**, the LAC assessed that this had had a positive impact on 100% of participants:

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<sup>4</sup> At time of writing, the LAC has completed follow-up calls with 7 participants from Blocks 1-3 with calls for the Block 4 participants due to take place in August 2022.

All 3 [participants in the third block] said that physical fitness is a goal and the walks and work in the gardens and woodlands were a good starting point. Mentally all said they were anxious but made to feel welcome.

In terms of becoming **a more active member of their local community** the LAC commented:

Not with all the [block 1] participants, as not all were at that stage, but it certainly demonstrated ways this could happen.

Both [block 2] attendees had stated this was a goal of theirs. One is still looking at other activities, the other has a volunteer role.

Two [block 3 participants] were pleased at feeling involved in a busy location. The other is already involved in their local community, so this was a departure for them out of their comfort zone.

In terms of **building structure and focus into their week**, the LAC felt this has a positive impact on all 100% of participants, commenting:

One [block 2 participant] was looking to get out of the house and involved for the first time in a long [time]. The other was looking for potential activities to add to their week, of which, returning to volunteering was a goal.

Very important for all of the [block 3] participants who previously were struggling with isolation and dislocation from “normal”.

In terms of **re-building confidence, resilience, and self-esteem**, the LAC reported an improvement, stating:

[Block 1] Again, depending on the individual, but all reported some improvement

[Block 2] Both reported feeling [the] Thrive [project] had helped in this area

[Block 3] Yes, and I think it was very evident in 2 of the attendees

In terms of **further developing life skills such as timekeeping, communication skills and resilience**, the LAC reported a positive benefit:

This is harder to quantify. One [block 1] volunteer was late to most sessions. All 3 reported that they felt the sessions had helped them, and would consider volunteering as an option

Both [block two participants] were very reliable for time keeping and attendance. Both said they felt benefit from the activities they undertook, plus felt comfortable and supported with conversation and communication needs



Asked whether the project had helped participants to **gain an insight into their own local heritage and make a valuable contribution and connection** to an internationally significant heritage site, the LAC noted this was a valuable opportunity for participants commenting:

This was a great opportunity to see the impact the Scott and Abbotsford have made over the years.

One had previously attended Abbotsford as part of another project and was keen to return. The other said he was surprised and impressed with Abbotsford as he hadn't visited before.

All said they were very impressed by the location and all had an existing interest in history. The library in particular was commented on.

When asked if the participants had become **familiar with the facilities available at Abbotsford** (e.g. the free-to-access path network) and **confidence to access these independently** to support wellbeing, the LAC responded positively, stating:

One participant has already enquired about walking groups in Abbotsford

Yes, all said they would return out with the project

### **Gaining experience of short-term volunteering in preparation for a more committed volunteering opportunity at Abbotsford or elsewhere**

One participant has already taken on a volunteering role nearer their locality. The other 2 are considering it as an option for later in the year

Yes, it was a refresher for one, who has now taken on a volunteer post in Galashiels. The other commented on how they would consider volunteering as a steppingstone to regaining employment.

Yes for two in particular who are either going to volunteer at Abbotsford or are considering volunteering as a way to make changes in their lives.

The participant who attended all the sessions [in Block 3] said that he really enjoyed the venue and activities, due to his interest in history, but stressed that he found the support and communications he had received from Mary Kenny had been a real boost for him, and this has helped him to look out with his comfort zone for other activities.

### **Project outcome: the number of individuals involved in further volunteer opportunities**

As a result of the project, 2 participants have started to volunteer within their community and 5 are actively considering volunteering in the future.

On volunteering specifically, the LAC had further comment on the impact on individuals:

This [project] is a great opportunity for participants to test out if volunteering is for them, but also as a venue, with the access that participants had, it was an experience that resonated with all three. All said they had enjoyed the range of activities, even if it was not something they would've considered before, they saw it as a learning experience.

Engagement had been difficult for two of the participants due to other commitments and personal circumstance. However, both have said they enjoyed the sessions they attended, with one being particularly pleased she was able to attend the session in the visitor centre she had missed, as this was one of the areas she really wanted to look at. She is now considering applying for a position volunteering at the Visitor Centre as this is an area she has interest and experience in. She commented how during the session she had interacted with tourists and managed to sell some merchandise to them, which had been a massive boost to her confidence. The other has considered volunteering as a future option.

### **Gain an insight into careers and jobs** within the tourism sector on their doorstep

Yes, comments were made about the number and diversity of origin of the busloads of tourists that appear.

### **Rebuild confidence and wellbeing related to fears of Covid 19**

[Block 1] This wasn't specifically discussed, but all managed to travel to and attend sessions in spite of restrictions and their fears.

[Block 2] Yes, due to the timing of this block this was a concern for both, but they commented on how the necessary guidelines were reinforced, and necessary precautions followed, resulting in them feeling comfortable in the surroundings.

[Block 3] Less of an issue due to relaxing of strict guidelines but still a concern. All felt that necessary guidelines and relevant support was given.

### **Conclusion and next steps**

With generous support from the Scottish Borders Council *Build Back a Better Borders Recovery Fund* we have delivered a high-quality pilot project with rich outcomes for our participants and learning for the Abbotsford Trust.

We have learned each week what it takes to facilitate meaningful experiences for this vulnerable audience and to do it in a way that is supportive, kind, impactful and positive. We have learned that for some of our participants, just leaving home, meeting new people and seeing through a new commitment is a real effort and a huge step forward in lives which can often be chaotic and uncertain.

Staff and volunteer support has been key to the success of this project and the emphasis on positive experiences and moving forward has been critical. We have built a safe and secure environment for our participants and carefully designed a programme of activity that has allowed them to genuinely consider how to make changes in their own lives for the better.

Internally, our project has demonstrated a huge willing on the part of staff and volunteers to facilitate this type of work and overcome the stigma of mental health.

We know that we have experimented and learned a great deal through this project, but we still have some way to go to develop our knowledge, understanding and confidence around mental health. We are keen to invest in staff skills by establishing mental health champions throughout our staff team and to provide further training for the learning team in Mental Health First Aid.

The project has also given us an insight into the remit of statutory mental health provision and where this crosses over with third sector provision. We better understand the challenges facing our local community and the increased pressure that Covid-19 has placed on the most vulnerable people in society who were already at risk of poor health and exclusion, and the services which seek to support them. This project has further helped the trust to understand the niche we can occupy in the wider landscape of mental health and how we can genuinely realise the potential of our heritage for wider public good.

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