



interest LINK
BORDERS

Roxburgh Impact Report 2023

*I talk more
it's fun*

lots of new friends

I feel like I belong

Made good friends

You treat me with respect

I love being out and about

more confident speaking out

Proud of what I can do

I'm happy in the group

Our Aims and Activities

Interest Link was founded by family carers in 1990 and works across the Scottish Borders to improve the quality of life of socially excluded children (aged 8+), young people and adults with learning disabilities and autism. We aim to help our members connect with their communities through friendships and shared opportunities, having fun and improving their happiness, confidence, self-esteem and social skills.

We achieve our aims through a volunteer befriending service that creates and supports social groups and 1:1 links for around 215 members annually. It is delivered through four local projects (Berwickshire, Central Borders, Roxburgh and Tweeddale) each with its own staff and local committee of stakeholders. They work with local schools, Borders College, Social Work and care providers to reach as many people as possible.

Our support is longterm and sustainable throughout transitions. It also provides respite for around 250 family carers annually. Activities are delivered with the help of around 200 peer-age volunteers, including around 60 of school-age. All volunteers are PVG checked, trained (including adult and child protection) & supported by staff.

Our befriending model has developed through co-production and regular consultation and includes traditional 1:1 links, befriending groups, overnight trips and in-school groups. Group activities are similar to those of mainstream youth and social groups such as arts & crafts, drama, film, gardening, music, cookery, games and outdoor adventures.

Our members and the need for the service

Our members have a lifelong condition that affects their development and means they need help to understand information, learn skills and live independently. Cerebral Palsy, Downs Syndrome & Autism are often involved, with high accompanying levels of epilepsy & sensory impairment.

Members are socially excluded throughout their lives: Most children are taught in additional needs units and lack opportunities for friendships, art, drama or sport that are crucial to wellbeing and achieving their full potential. Only around 1% of people with learning disabilities have a partner in adult life and 4.5% a job, and we hope to maximise the chances of positive destinations in these areas.

The family carers of our members with learning disabilities have a role which is difficult to sustain, isolating, reduces their opportunities, affects their wellbeing and often involves financial hardship.

Roxburgh Activities

In the 12 months to the end of July 2023 we supported 55 members with learning disabilities. There were 15 1:1 links and 55 member places in our 8 befriending groups. 65 family carers enjoyed short break respite. Branch Co-ordinator Val Reilly and Assistant Rebecca Duffell deliver the service, along with sessional workers, tutors and 45 volunteers.

Developments:

- We started a new in-school lunchtime group at Burnfoot Primary School in Hawick and managed the tricky feat of giving pupils from other schools videolink access to our Wilton Primary and Hawick High groups
- Our new intergenerational Zoom baking group had its origins in the pandemic and is now a regular part of our service.
- Two new fortnightly adult groups for ages 17 and upwards are planned for Autumn 2023, responding to the reduction in meaningful activities offered by college and statutory services.

Our other groups are:

- Children's Group (8-16s) and Young people's Group (16-25s)
- Yong Adults BFF group
- Caledonian Group

Highlights of the year included:

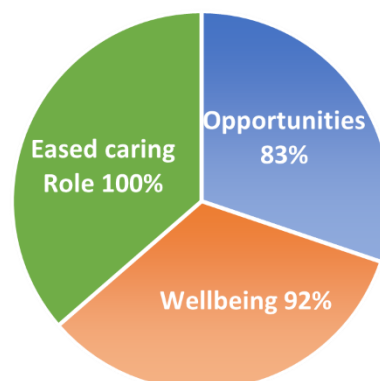
- [Pantomime](#) in January performed to family & friends at the Heart of Hawick Theatre.
- In February 2023 Interest Link won the overall Loving our Volunteers award and one of our volunteers was given individual recognition.
- In April 2023 Interest Link held the first [Charmian Challenge](#) fun run in memory of former director Charmian Ledsham, with 120 members, carers and volunteers taking part.
- In May 2023 Roxburgh ran our most ambitious overnight trips yet: our first two-night trip on the overnight ferry to Amsterdam ([video](#) & [photoreport](#)) and our largest trip ever, by 12 members, 8 volunteers and 3 staff to Keilder([video](#) & [photoreport](#)). Both were joint trips with other branches, ensuring new friends were made.

Roxburgh Outcomes at a Glance

Member Outcomes



Carer Outcomes



June 2023 Roxburgh Outcomes Survey

We surveyed supported members, family carers, volunteers, tutors and care professionals in June 2023, using accessible questionnaires deployed face-to-face, online and by telephone and post.

Response rates	Members	Family carers	Volunteers	Tutors		
	51%	42%	59%	43%		
Main Outcomes:						
Impact on Members	More Friends	More opportunities	Greater Happiness	Improved Confidence	Increased Self-esteem	Better Social Skills
Reported by Themselves	100%	92%	100%	88%	92%	96%
Reported by Carers	100%	100%	100%	92%	92%	100%
Reported by Volunteers	96%		96%	92%	92%	100%
Impact on Family Carers	More Opportunities Outside Caring		Eased or More Sustainable Caring Role		Greater Wellbeing	
Reported by Themselves	83%		92%		100%	
Reported by Social Care Professionals	100%		100%		100%	
Impact on Volunteers	Increased Learning Disabilities Awareness		More confidence with people with learning disabilities			
Reported by Themselves	96%		96%			
Other responses:	Members	Family carers	Volunteers	Tutors	Social Care Professionals	
Service still needed	100%	100%			100%	
Feel valued & supported by Interest Link	100%		100%	100%		
Volunteering has met hopes and expectations			96%			
Safe & Professional Service					100%	

Links to feedback:

[Members](#)

[Carers](#)

[Volunteers](#)

[Care professionals](#)

[Tutors](#)

Selected Feedback: Members

[Top](#)

Outcome/Theme	Quotes
Confidence	I have become more confident in myself.
Confidence	Gets me out of the house and it makes me more active meeting new people and less afraid
Confidence	I'm am much more confident to talk now
Confidence	Yes always kept to myself and now it makes me go out into the big world. Going out with Roger and helping out with Pantos with Interest Link Roxburgh
Confidence	I am more confident not had any of these opportunities in the past . I like them very much
Confidence	Before I was very shy and never spoke
Confidence	Yes I feel more confident about myself
Confidence	I feel better about how I deal with my feelings.
Friends	I am friends with the leaders and people who attend and even parents
Friends	A lot of friends
Friends	John is my friend and I enjoy going out for coffee with him every fortnight
Friends	I have met some really good people that am happy to call my friends.
Friends	I get to be a part of a group of young folk where I can just be me
Happiness	It is like a family
Happiness	I can get out the house and do something I love
Happiness	I enjoy everything about Interest Link, even online groups
Happiness	I am happy just now with everything
Happiness	I am So happy and feel good about myself
Happiness	I really enjoyed the trip to Amsterdam this year and would love to do something similar again in the future. I am excited to be doing another Panto.
Opportunities	Val's group gave me a good opportunity to see what I can do and helped me make more friends
Opportunities	I go out with Roger and do lots of interesting things to do with railways, volcanoes, walks. Roger supported me to do lots of interviews online during covid.
Opportunities	Different groups and now I'm part of the online cooking group with Liz because Val sorted it out for Christine the volunteer to come to my house to help me and support me to bake in my own kitchen. Also part of Rugby WhatsApp Banter and 1-1 with John my volunteer
Opportunities	Tried new foods.
Opportunities	Tried new foods, meet new friends.
Opportunities	The chance to go out independently
Opportunities	Online interviews . Making a volcano with Jane and Roger made me feel really good. It was an amazing thing to do. It is now on display for everyone to see at Wild woods . I even got to go out for a picnic there to see it for myself with Roger and Val
Opportunities	Getting the chance to do 2 pantos and being the lead in the second was great! Really boosted my confidence.
Self-esteem	I feel good. People listen to my ideas to see if they are good or not. Roger always helps me with confidence and speaking
Self-esteem	You all treat me with respect and listen to what I have to say and what I would like to do.
Self-esteem	I didn't believe in myself but they showed me I liked being a show
Self-esteem	Learning new baking skills with Liz made me more independent to cook for myself as liz covers lots of things
Self-esteem	I got better at drama
Self-esteem	The panto showed who I was and a really really big thank you to you Val

Social Skills	Alex looks forward to coming and plans in the morning what he would like to tell the group.
Social Skills	It's helped me communicate with others.
Social skills	Talk better because of the drama
Social skills	Roger has helped and supported me and I think I'm getting better at talking to people.
Social skills	Alex uses finger spelling and his iPad to talk to the group
Social skills	Katie uses her electronic talker at the group.
Social skills	Jackson uses verbal communication more at the group now than he used to.
Suggestions	Maybe have a paddling pool of mackerel!

Selected Feedback: Family Carers

[Top](#)

Outcome/Theme	Quotes
Carer Opportunities	The befriending service is needed to allow my son to experience going on outing's with some one other than a family member, it also gives my husband and I some quality time together.
Carer Opportunities	It gives us time to catch with our other children.
Carer Opportunities	I can go away walking, swimming meeting up with friends.
Carer Opportunities	It gives us an opportunity to spend time with other family members.
Carer Opportunities	Go to friends for cuppa and chat
Carer Opportunities	We like to go hill walking which Elliot is unable to do
Carer Opportunities	For two hours husband and I can have a meal and good chat.
Carer Opportunities	Knowing your young person is safe and enjoying themselves give the family peace of mind so that time can be spent chilling, shopping, visiting friends/relatives etc which an be tricky other wise.
Carer Opportunities	It is nice having some free time to do what we enjoy.
Carer Opportunities	We can have an outing knowing that Elliot is supported and enjoying himself while giving us some quality time together.
Eased caring role	It gives us a break
Eased caring role	We enjoy time together with no pressure.
Eased caring role	Definitely has eased things
Eased caring role	Gives the family the much needed break.
Family Wellbeing	Our daughter is in a much happier place then she was before she started the group and her confidence continues to grow. this lifts the whole family.
Family Wellbeing	The support is second to none and the items that have been received were very much appreciated. Knowing your young person is safe and having fun is a huge weight off your mind and she looks forward to the sessions so it's a win win all round.
Family Wellbeing	As long as he is happy I am
Member Confidence	It has taken a few years for her be confidant to speak to the other members and volunteers. It's amazing
Member Confidence	Learning to be a bit more independent.
Member Confidence	Due to things like pantomimes, choirs, bake a longs, wild woods trips to name just a few has helped greatly.
Member Confidence	Getting more confident on the bus to Hawick
Member Confidence	More confident
Member Confidence	Yes the opportunity to make friends, working together and participating in group activities has helped her to definitely be more confident, assertive and self esteem.
Member Friends	Only time my daughter sees her friends
Member Friends	Loves the staff interaction and his friends he sees every other week
Member Friends	For my daughter seeing some friends in zoom is been great
Member Happiness	Exactly and he comes home stimulated and wanting to do.
Member Happiness	My son loves his monthly meetings
Member Happiness	Most definitely as we can see the change in her and how happy she is around the group.
Member Happiness	Sarah really enjoys getting out and about.
Member Happiness	Lock down really affected his mental health and this service has helped him so much.
Member Opportunities	It's the only way besides hospital that she can get out of the house
Member Opportunities	So many different activities, drama cooking etc. good opportunities

Member Opportunities	Elliot has made new friends and experienced going on a short break with them which has given him more confidence.
Member Opportunities	Most definitely from the children's group right through. The opportunities and experiences have been greatly beneficial and the young people might never have had the opportunity otherwise.
Member Opportunities	She enjoyed going away with the group to Amsterdam, had an amazing time and was well looked after
Member Social skills	She now talks to the other members and volunteers. So much confidence.
Need	It is very beneficial to our daughter as it is her social circle and without she would have no friends due her mutism. She has grown to trust the volunteers and the other members in her group.
Need	Sarah needs this service as there is not a lot of opportunities to mix with small groups of people around about her age.
Need	Great link for our Daughter to make new friends and be part of something out of home, also gives her an opportunity in school to do some extra online activities building new relationships.
Need	Only group my daughter has loves going to group
Need	My daughter has been with your selves for a great number of years. She has made some great friends, been given some fantastic opportunities and Val in particular is worth her weight in gold. There has been support and guidance not only for my daughter but for the family too and if this service wasn't there it would be devastating.
Praise for Staff & Service	Sarah loves coming to the group, likes her online baking, she gets on well with the support workers. Val and Becca are great at organising everything. Hopefully she will be there for many more years.
Praise for Staff & Service	You all do a great job, always friendly, understanding, and treat our young people with respect. keep up the great work.
Praise for Staff & Service	The staff have been great especially Val, from her communication, her bubbly personality and trust/care all plays a huge part in taking these young people forward and helping them reach their goals. The opportunities and experiences are fantastic and gives them new skills. We would all be lost without Interest link , "A happy child is a happy family". This family can't thank you enough.

Outcome/Theme	Quotes
Confidence making friends with people with learning disabilities	This gave me a newfound confidence to work and help bring out the most for these YP and their experience. I am now going to work with YP with disabilities in America.
ditto	Yes more confident and understand every ones needs
ditto	It gets me more excited for Monday and it helped me to play with kids with disabilities.
ditto	Learning disability work was new to me but I was able to learn so much in treating people totally as individuals rather than in some social category.
Friendships	I've made new friends.
LD Awareness	Totally I understand more that difficulties are not a barrier in some cases they prove to be a strength, I have learned so much the group has given me more than I could ever give back
LD Awareness	People need to be aware that they are individuals with strengths and insights just like people without learning disabilities
LD Awareness	It has made me think how vulnerable they can be. Plus the role of parents is challenging perhaps.
Member Outcomes	The group as given the youngsters the confidence to try different things. The annual pantomime has brough all the group together, brining them out of their shell and mot of all having fun whilst doing so,
Member Outcomes	More consideration for others and understanding others points of view. Caring about others. And some great questions about family relationships
Member Outcomes	More confident
Member Outcomes	Young person now a member of local gym attending on their own
Member Outcomes	i saw when we were on the Amsterdam trip that everyone did so well by talking to new people and understanding how different things works for different people.
Member Outcomes	In our panto, they were so much more confident and supported each other
Member Outcomes	More confident ,more friendly, more active .
Member Outcomes	We recently have had 2 new members join and at the last meeting they joined in completely and seemed to have lost their initial shyness.
Member Outcomes	Pantomimes have helped the young people confidence hugely.
Member outcomes	It is great to see with a little help how they grow with confidence and are happy and that makes me happy as they are getting a chance in life
Other Volunteer Outcomes	Motivation come from the fun activities we have done. Seeing the fun and enthusiasm on the young peoples faces. The happiness I feel after I've been. The laughs I've had with the group.
Other Volunteer Outcomes	Volunteering always feels like a reward even after a long day at another job, it's helped me a lot in being more confident working with people who have disabilities and there's no particular memory that stands out as every time I've been with Interest Link it has just been amazing every time!
Other Volunteer Outcomes	I love every minute of it. It's ridiculous how much I love it!
Other Volunteer Outcomes	Can't remember why I started volunteering exactly but thoroughly enjoy it. Made real friends with who I support and we enjoy trips away, local activities and coffees
Other Volunteer Outcomes	Really enjoyed the experience over the past three years. I feel I have kept in touch with my skills as a teacher as well as offering support to a young person.
Other Volunteer Outcomes	I have been volunteering for eight years and have enjoyed the group sessions very much. It's so wonderful and inspiring to see each young person achieve their goals working so hard together as a team .

Other Volunteer Outcomes	Definitely, I wanted to help out / support local groups and feel like I could give something back
Other Volunteer Outcomes	Being able to support people in the community and see how happy they are
Praise for staff	Becca and Val are always a great laugh, so helpful and just amazing to have had the opportunity to learn from them both.
Praise for staff	Absolutely. The easiest and warmest staff I've ever volunteered with.
Praise for staff	Val my coordinator is always supportive and treats me as an individual. She knows me well
Praise for staff	Val is very appreciative.
Suggestions	I love being outside with the group all the time, it would be great if we could be outside year round!
Suggestions	More outside activities.
Suggestions	It would be great if we could try to do baking .

Outcome/Theme	Quotes
Carer Outcomes	The positive respite has a positive impact of helping families be more balanced and thus more sustainable as carers. The biggest impact that I hear commented on is the knock on effect of young people being happy, being involved and being valued. All of this has a very positive impact on carers happiness and well being.
Carer Outcomes	Opportunity for the individual to socialise without family members and gives family some natural respite
Gap in provision	Super link from school to evening groups, attending the group in school has allowed young people to move on to the evening group. These provide a social setting for the young people that they do not have elsewhere and support for the families in term of seeing their child included with in a group, casual parental interaction through the group.
General	Also helping support transition to high school !
General	Students in HHS thoroughly have enjoyed sessions. They visibly feel relaxed, motivated, confident, enjoying the relationships and various interesting activities.
General	A really valuable service. Keep up the good work!
Member outcomes	At the pantomime I saw some young people participate with a confidence level that was unusually high for them, I see happy faces both in school during sessions and in pictures online. The group work approach is modelled beautifully by staff and volunteers who support the young people to interact.
Member outcomes	Opportunities to do things independently from their families out with school
Member outcomes	Independence is being promoted and new skills learnt which has build the persons confidence and self esteem.
Member outcomes	The peer mentors have developed their understanding and empathy for children with Additional Needs. The members have developed their communication skills.
Praise for Staff & Service	The staff and volunteers are great at helping everyone be involved and feel included and that is the perfect springboard to seeing positive influence on everyone.
Praise for Staff & Service	Val and Becca have been so welcoming, they bring a calm and caring atmosphere to the group. The children's group has been a great chance for the Service user I support to meet adults and other young people they will be attending school with next year. This has been great for the transition to high school and made many faces more familiar.
Safe and professional	Professional communication, notice of any changes given in good time, well prepared for activities.
Safe and professional	Extensive risk assessments are carried out prior to activities taking place.
Safe and professional	Safe and professional yet relaxed
Safe and professional	Well organised and appropriate activities

Outcome/Theme	Quotes
Member Outcomes	Loved being involved as a tutor - I think we all have fun together around food. Watching the children and young people try new foods and surprise themselves what they can do. Their delight in enjoying each session - preparing, making and trying new foods. Always like how everyone comes together sharing and chatting
Member Outcomes	I was impressed with everyone's willingness to give singing a go even if they weren't sure
Member Outcomes	Opening them up to new learning experiences through food is great - see each person enjoy and have fun whilst developing knowledge and skills through food activities
Praise for staff & Service	Volunteers, young people , Becca and Val make the sessions run smoothly- Thank you
Tutor Outcomes	Just love that I have had the chance to work with all the groups.
Member Outcomes	Loved being involved as a tutor - I think we all have fun together around food. Watching the children and young people try new foods and surprise themselves what they can do. Their delight in enjoying each session - preparing, making and trying new foods. Always like how everyone comes together sharing and chatting
Member Outcomes	I was impressed with everyone's willingness to give singing a go even if they weren't sure
Member Outcomes	Opening them up to new learning experiences through food is great - see each person enjoy and have fun whilst developing knowledge and skills through food activities
Praise for staff & Service	Volunteers, young people , Becca and Val make the sessions run smoothly- Thank you
Tutor Outcomes	Just love that I have had the chance to work with all the groups.