



# Case studies

## 2019-21

This is a small selection from the case studies written by Branch Co-ordinators over 2019-21 (newest first). They cover a broad age range and include members living with family carers or independently with support, some in 1:1 links and others in befriending groups.

Hopefully they give a good idea of the breadth of our service and the impact it has on members, family carers & volunteers.

## Berwickshire 2021

G is 31, has a learning disability and is registered blind. He lives with Mum who is his main carer. When G's Mum first got in touch with Interest Link to ask for support they had recently moved down to the Borders from Edinburgh and due to a dispute between Councils as to who was responsible for G he got no help whatsoever from any service other than ours and sadly, as he had moved, he had no friends here.

G has had a one-to-one link with S for the past 3 years. They are a great match and have a lovely mutual friendship as they are both gregarious and fun loving and they enjoy a wide range of activities when they meet up fortnightly. S has also built a strong relationship with G's Mum who finds the respite offered by the link invaluable. G says: "We have a great time and lots of FUN together!" S brings a lot of skill and warmth to the relationship due to her professional experience and personality. She has provided friendship and companionship at an important time in the family's life and it is very reassuring to Mum to know G has a friend outside the family circle. S has seen G's confidence grow over the time they have been friends. S has now moved and has a round trip of 86 miles to visit, but has no plans to stop meeting.

During lockdown G joined in with Zoom sessions and enjoyed a range of activities such as art, cooking, music and Drama. These sessions helped to overcome the isolation he experienced when the services he had been accessing were closed.

Recently G joined our Friday Club in Coldstream which meets monthly in the evening for social and fun activities together (the members decide on the plan for the sessions). He was an immediate hit with the other members and the Club will enable him to extend his network of friends further to include more of his peers. His Mum says his confidence has grown and he really looks forward to our meetings. He took great delight in dressing up for our Halloween party and showing everyone his decorated pumpkin.



## Berwickshire 2021

L is 70 and has a learning disability, autism, arthritis and is coeliac. She lives in her own flat in supported accommodation.

During lockdown L received an iPad to allow her to take part in Zoom meetings where she was able to meet her peers virtually and take part in stimulating activities such as crafting, art, baking and music. She can be seen above joining in a Zoom music session where she had made a percussion 'instrument' from a bottle. She adores music so this was perfect for her. She continues to meet with a small group of 4-6 other members on Zoom monthly (post-Covid) for Blethers!

L has had a one-to-one link with one of our fantastic volunteers, B, since 2006 with whom she meets every fortnight and enjoys a very close bond. "We have great times together." L says: "She phones me every Sunday and we make plans for what we are going to do together." "I really enjoy seeing B. It's nice to have a friend who isn't a carer". B is very sensitive to Linda's needs and interests. They have super times together meeting up in Berwick to go shopping, trips to the beach, lunch and coffees out together etc. L waxes lyrical about how much Interest Link means to her and describes our charity as "tremendous". Meeting up with B which sometimes involves getting the bus has helped L's independence and given her confidence to try new things as well as engage in things she likes to do. Both have recently had slight issues with mobility but they work around this and continue to meet and have fun. L reported being very lonely following the death of her mother and said that Interest Link helped her through this.

L plays an active role as a Member Representative on our Branch Committee which meets every two months. Being involved in the committee and using technology have also helped L's confidence, self-esteem and wellbeing. Becoming involved in the committee perhaps also gave Linda the confidence to join The Citizens' Panel out-with Interest Link.



## Central Borders 2021

M is 29 and has been with Interest Link for nearly 13 years, first in the youth groups and now in our adult sessions. She has been in our craft and cooking classes, starred in our panto and attended cake decoration classes at the local college with a volunteer as well as sitting on our Board as a special adviser.

Megan is a lovely bright young woman, lives in a supported tenancy and is close to her mum and family who live nearby. She works in a local hairdressing salon and loves to socialise. Megan found herself being less active during lockdown and wanted to focus on getting fit so she is now linked up with our wonderful volunteer J and they have started to attend the gym together – they are planning to use the gym as well as attend classes.

Megan says she can't wait to be showing off her fitness gains and that her and J will be able to keep each other going. Megan says she feels very comfy with J.

Megan's mum Trish says "For myself, this link up has been a godsend. Megan has been keen to go to the gym for sometime, but as you know these things are not so much fun on your own. J will give her the much needed company and motivation to keep going. Hopefully this will help Megan improve her overall fitness, and I am happy about that."

J says "Megan and I are having great fun attending the local gym. Megan is just starting out with the gym but already I can see that she's loving going and is really enthusiastic. It's great to do something different and we are enjoying each other's company and keeping fit at the same time which is an added bonus. We will also be attending some classes, where I'm sure Megan will be showing me with her Zumba moves.'



## Central Borders 2021

R is 32, has a learning disability and lives with her mum – she is close to her sisters and family. She is a happy and bright young woman. She has been with us for about 9 years and she is always enthusiastic to try all our sessions - she has attended cooking, drama, craft and is currently doing animation where she has made short films using the stop start method of which she is rightly proud. R also joined us on Zoom social events during the restrictions of the pandemic.

R's mum says "As a parent, my main thing is that the groups are a vital link for R –she is a different person when she comes away (from the groups) - she comes away totally satisfied and proud of herself which is a lovely thing to see. It's important for her to see her friends and there is no other opportunity. She enjoys all the activities and feels she wants to do everything, she changes each term and this speaks volumes and is lovely. It makes me happy to see her like this and gives me a bit of a break too. It might seem corny but it is so positive for R and me."



### Central Borders 2020

J is 26 years old and lives with her mum and dad. She has learning disabilities and a hearing impairment. She has been a member of Interest Link for 5 years now and she has been very busy with us throughout that time! J is in our Monday sessions where she has shown great aptitude and passion for drama and panto, has attended our baking sessions and prior to lockdown was attending our fitness and movement classes. J has many friends in the groups and is always focussed on our activities.

During lockdown J has been very participative in our Zoom sessions and she has enjoyed the Clubbercise disco fitness with her whole family who have a fabulous display of disco lights in their sitting room. J has also joined in with our Zoom arts and crafts, baking and bingo.

Her mum says "What a great range of activities Interest Link has provided during lockdown! It has been so important to keep some routine going in these strange times and J really looks forward to the sessions. She has loved joining in with all the activities but some of her favourites have been cooking, musical bingo and art. She doesn't always say much during the sessions but enjoys hearing everyone chatting and seeing her friends' faces. Interest Link has a way of making all the activities fun. It has been good for us, her parents, too as we worry less about her mental wellbeing."



## Roxburgh 2020

Some of the 8 Caledonian Group members have been sharing experiences, interests and activities together for the last 25 years and all have a special bond with each other and the volunteers who support them.

It was very hard for group members to come to terms with the implications of lockdown and the loss of their social connections. All had lost their Day or Outreach Services.

A Caledonian WhatsApp group was formed to share pictures/posts/ photos and messages of encouragement to their friends, but one member, James lives up in the hills and had no mobile phone reception, only email: an email was compiled with all the WhatsApp quizzes, posts, photos, messages and activities from his friends, allowing him to feel more connected. James' parents were very grateful for these connections and elated to see the look of joy on James face.

We were then able to secure iPads for J and two other group members from Connecting Scotland and start a weekly Zoom group (the Coffee Pod).

When restrictions eased further J was overjoyed to be able to invite G from the group over to his Wooden Pod, in the garden where (socially distanced) he caught up with all her gossip.

J says "[I'm] really happy to be able to see my friends again after so long and know we have another way of keeping in touch".

J's father commented "over the years the Caledonian Group has been brilliant for J and it has been the only activity for him over the last 6 months. The iPad never leaves his side and Zoom works despite our poor internet connection."



## Roxburgh 2020

C is in his 30`s, lives independently and is supported by SBCares. J is an older volunteer who has a son with a learning disability. He enjoys his link with C and finds it rewarding: "Really enjoy volunteering and it has had a positive effect on my life". Activities have been mainly active such as going to the gym, walking, taking in wildlife, and going to football and rugby matches.

When Lock down came the two buddies were devastated but a WhatsApp Group was set up enabling the banter to continue and giving C a social lifeline. They also joined the branch Facebook group, enabling C to feel connected with the wider organization.

J and C have now been able to meet for a socially distanced coffee, which has been a great relief to both of them.

C has said that "I'm happy, I look forward to it. I like what we do together. It's made me more confident and I have new experiences & hobbies."

J said that "C seems happier and enjoys our times together"

We are now working with SBCares to get C his own email address so he can join Zoom and have a meet up with J and Rob Moffat, a rugby coach who last year arranged for C to travel to a Murrayfield match with J and meet some of his Scottish Rugby idols in person.



### **Berwickshire 2019/20**

S has Autism and recently left school not knowing what he wanted to do and very much lacking in confidence. He initially came to the youth group as a service user but was interested in taking on more responsibility and after a few months was taken on as a volunteer.

S enjoyed all the group activities but was particularly keen on the cookery we did. The venue where the group met also housed a community café, with which there was a fair amount of interaction, and S was asked if he would like to work in the cafe as an apprentice.

S took time to consider the offer as it was a lot to think about for him, with travel, time keeping, and training. He decided to go for it, it has been a great success and he is very pleased to be earning his own money.

S's parents are delighted at the progression that resulted from getting involved with Interest Link. S's Mum told me that "S's confidence has increased substantially since becoming a volunteer and he is very pleased with what he is doing. He is more outgoing and has a sense of growing up and now moving on in his life."



### Central Borders 2019-20

N is 19 years old and lives with her mum and dad – she is a bright and cheery girl who has been with us now for 2 years. N has learning disabilities and is mostly non-verbal but she communicates using her iPad. Her big smile and infectious laugh also let us know she is having fun! N especially enjoys the group as her best friend from her school days also attends so it helps them to stay in touch. It was great when we realised the connection and the girls were delighted as well.

N uses leg braces but this doesn't stop her fully participating in all our activities. In fact, N is looking forward to her first overnight trip with us...indoor sky diving!

N's mum and dad are wonderfully supportive and she even brought her lovely gran along to see our Christmas Panto. Her family say they love it that she is out and having fun with us!

N has also now joined into our Manic Monday sessions and enjoys the craft group – she has made new friends in the group and also connected with folk she already knew. She enjoys the banter, the half time cuppa and taking her projects home to show off her new skills.

We are just so pleased to have her with us!



## Roxburgh 2019-20

C is ten years old and lives with his parents and siblings. He is autistic and attends our community children's group and is also a member of our primary school lunchtime group.

C was initially unsure of joining in with us and was quite shy but he continued to attend the sessions nonetheless and is now a very much established member of the team! We have discovered that he has a fabulous singing voice and can dance up a storm! Our drama tutor actually spoke directly to C's mum to say C has a genuine talent for singing and dancing and she is now looking at other stage groups for C to consider. Here he is as Homer Simpson in our Panto.

C has a reluctance to try new foods but has started to experiment with the lunches and snacks we provide at both groups. He was once deliberating trying a chicken snack at the school group and the Primary 7 volunteers started a very cheerful chant of "Do it, do it" to encourage him...much laughter all round and after recovering from happy giggles, C tried the chicken and loved it...high fives from everyone and he insisted I sent a picture to his mum to show her. His mum was delighted – it's sometimes the little things.

Carrie, C's mum, sent us this message

"C enjoys the Interest Link group he attends, he wasn't keen at first as it was out of his comfort zone as he doesn't like going out much. However he is very relaxed when he's there and it has helped C try new things - even different foods which he's usually reluctant to try. C especially enjoyed the Christmas panto he looked great and was very relaxed. It's lovely to see C enjoying something different other than gaming which is usually his world and I enjoy the break even if it is for a short time, it makes me happy that he's interacting with the volunteers and other kids with disabilities - they all look like they get on so well."



### Central Borders 2019-20

Janet is 13 and had previously been a member of the children's group but left for a period due to difficulties at school which badly affected her confidence. Her mum called us and asked if Janet would be eligible for a 1:1 link and luckily we had just welcomed Alix as a volunteer. We felt they would be a wonderful fit and so started the introduction process. I am delighted to say that the girls instantly clicked.

They enjoyed a couple of home based craft sessions and then started to venture out a little, going to Macdonald's for ice cream. Whilst out for ice cream, they bumped into some pupils from school who had been unkind to Janet but she was greatly reassured by Alix's presence and they enjoyed their time together. The girls have now been to the cinema as well and are now booked up to attend a 1 day course at the local college in 'Festive baking'. Janet has also now come back to the children's group and is currently engrossed in our festive panto. It's great to see her back!

Her mum says 'My daughter Janet had been struggling with social isolation and lack of confidence before her link with Alix. Since they started meeting up she has found the confidence to start going back to Monday group. She enjoys going out for ice cream and to the cinema with Alix and loves chatting to her and being able to be just a typical teenager. It's wonderful to see'



## Roxburgh 2019-20

I am immensely proud to have witnessed all the group members journey`s while working on the Space Sheep film project with Alchemy, but I think the person who has gained the most from this particular project is R.

R is 16 and joined the Teenage group in September 2019 after leaving the Children`s Group in June 2019. He has a moderate learning disability and Cerebral Palsy. R has support at school but likes to be independent and Interest Link is the only other social outlet he has. His parents are very happy with the opportunity Interest Link provides to spend time with people of similar age and abilities,

R was a fabulous example to other children in the Children`s Group who are still learning social skills but was of an age where he was ready to move onto an older group. Initially it was difficult for him to be the youngest person again and he took a few months to settle in.

He is talented with computers and technology and has always been the person that people would ask for advice, so he was extremely excited about the Film Making Project and wanted to be very involved in the technical side of things from day one. However plenty of other members were also very excited too to be hands-on with real film equipment. He had to learn to stand back and help others do and achieve rather than just have fun with the equipment himself.

R`s parents love coming along to open evenings, are excited to see what he has been up to and keen for him to develop his computer and technical skills. He was recently involved in a Digital Memory Box Video with another service user and was extremely helpful during the creating and producing of this video. He was proud of his achievements and mum and dad were very proud of him too.



## Central Borders 2019

P is 10 years old and has autism. She lives with her mum, dad and brother. Her mum self-referred P as she was worried about her being lonely in school. P is now a popular member of our in-school lunchtime group. We meet every two weeks and we take in a picnic style lunch so that everyone can get the maximum amount of time together and also eat lunch as a group. We have our snacks, do a short planned activity and chat. We have thus far decorated reindeer cupcakes, made scrapbooks, played prize bingo and Jenga, made paper tissue floral bouquets and also had a session of Christmas crafts.

When we were developing the idea of the school groups, I asked P's mum if she thought it would be a good idea and if it would suit her daughter and she replied:

"I've just asked her and it's a definite 'yes' from her! I think that's a great thing to be doing at school for inclusion. Really benefit a lot of kids. Thank you."

After a period to recruit and train volunteers, the group has now been running fully since December and everyone is settled.

We asked P and her mum today how they felt about the group and they answered:

"Hi. I've just asked P how she feels about the lunch group and she really enjoys it. She says everyone has fun at it and that the children that are helping at the group are nice and understand her. I think it's a great thing because some days P is on her own at playtime/lunchtime which I find really sad but I know that when the group's on she is feeling included and happy."

She was so happy yesterday bringing her scrapbook home to show me!

Incidentally, Mrs B (principal teacher) phoned me yesterday asking if I thought P would be interested in going to the disabled riding group on Tuesdays. It is on at the Se time as your group. I told her I'd ask her but doubted it as I know how much she loves the group. When she came home from school I told her about it. She seemed interested but as soon as she realised the timing she said "no, no definitely not!". She knows what she likes!"

**Volunteers:** The intake of peer mentors was much higher than we had hoped for: we now have two teams of 5 peer mentors each and this allows for further friendships within the school environment. The peer mentors all seem to very much enjoy the activities as well as the group setting and are very enthusiastic.

H's mum says of his volunteering:

"I think it shows there all different people out there and it gives them the opportunity to help others. Hamish loves to come as he is happy to help others and they also help him".

Another volunteer's mum has told us:



“An amazing, fun and very worthwhile experience, building awareness and confidence for everyone involved...T has absolutely loved it...being a part of something they see as quite special.”

The class teacher of all the peer mentors messaged us the following –

“The buddy club brought to us by Interest Link has provided children with an excellent opportunity develop their skills in communication, empathy and team work.

The children are always excited to attend group and I can see that they enjoy the responsibility it allows. They talk positively about the group activities and are keen to chat to the younger children when they meet them in and around the school.”

From an Interest Link staff perspective we very much hope to continue with the group and see the positive impact on not only our group members but the wider school community.



## Berwickshire 2019

M is a 65 year old lady who has a learning disability and cerebral palsy and lives in supported accommodation. She has been a member with us for over 17 years and has been linked 1-1 in the past which she has enjoyed and benefitted from very much. Over the last few years her health has deteriorated significantly and she is now in constant pain and discomfort and confined to a wheelchair.

For the past 5 years she has attended our Coldstream Friday Club and remains chatty and cheerful despite her ill health. With help from support staff for personal care, she loves the opportunity to go on our outings - to the beach or local beauty spots to nature watch, bird spot and get up close to highland cattle. She also delights in our social occasions e.g. having a BBQ or parties with us, or making crafts, helping with our fete or even being in our own Club mini-pantomime. Additionally, she is a valued member of our Branch Committee and says she likes to hear about and give us her thoughts about our branch activities.

When asked what she likes best about the Club M said 'everything' and laughed.

Support staff feel that it is great that 'M engages in activities that are fun and not just day-to-day' and feels she has benefitted hugely over the years and in many ways including increased self-esteem from being in our branch committee.



## Central Borders 2019

S (volunteer) and M (member) met in our Monday night drama group where they are both currently involved in our 2019 panto project.

M is in her 50s and lives on her own in a supported tenancy in a local town. She has been involved with Interest Link for a long time but was not coming to our groups at the time we launched the drama group. M thought the sessions might not be for her but then met the drama tutor at our annual Friendship Day and really enjoyed his workshop at the event. We suggested she popped along for one evening to see if she liked it and explained that there was no obligation if she felt it wasn't for her. M was a star in the making from that very first night. She started to learn how to film a scene with the cameras as the group were making a film at that time and loved it, even dancing in the last scene.

The following year we decided that the group would do a panto and M was cast as the panto 'baddie'. It was during this time that she met S who had started to volunteer and also joined the drama group. This was not a link introduction but rather that that they both just got on so well and started to link together during the group – we love that people make natural friendship of their own during the sessions. The pair got on famously very quickly – they are both great fun, direct and they just understand each other! S found a great costume for M in a charity shop and encouraged M through her nerves for the performance.. and what a performance it was.. M genuinely brought the house down. This year there is another panto in the offing and everyone is fully involved.

M's levels of joy and excitement are a joy to see. S says she loves coming to the group and seeing M because they simply enjoy each other's company and friendship.

I asked M last week what she would be doing if she wasn't at the group and she said "sleeping!"..S said she would be 'dodging housework'.. at which point the pair laughed loudly together and excused themselves.. there was a rehearsal to attend and the show must go on..

