



The Value of People

Childrens Service

**Pilot Evaluation and
Development Proposal**

by



November 2010

Interest Link Borders Children's Service

1. Background

Interest Link Borders was founded in Berwickshire in 1990 in order to provide 1:1 volunteer support for adults with learning disabilities, enabling them to undertake social and leisure activities of their choice.

In 2001 the project expanded to cover the whole of the Scottish Borders through branches in Duns, Galashiels, Hawick and Peebles. This followed the findings of a feasibility study which had shown the need for its services to be more widespread.

In 2003 the project began its Buddies initiative, providing opportunities for people with learning disabilities to access educational opportunities through community education classes through the support of volunteers.

Since then the project has further expanded in 2007 to provide peer mentoring for young people with learning disabilities through a fortnightly young people's group, and in late 2009 through the pilot of 1:1 support for children with learning disabilities aged 11-15.

2. Evaluation Process

Interest Link Borders' services for children, young people and adults were all evaluated in September 2010 by Befriending Network Scotland. This process involved gathering information by phone, email and face to face meetings with parents and carers, volunteers, referral agency staff and service users.

A summary of the findings from that evaluation which relate specifically to the pilot Children's Service, are detailed in this report.

3. The Children's Service Pilot

The Children's Service Pilot is running from September 2009 to March 2011, enabling children aged 11-16 who have complex learning needs to access mainstream out-of-school activities through 1:1 links with adult volunteers.

4. Publicity and Referrals

The service was principally publicised by email to the 64 local primary schools and 9 local secondary schools. Relevant Social Work and NHS staff were also asked to publicise the service to families.

It's been a really positive experience working with them (Interest Link). I hope they can continue and ideally expand (referral agency)

A total of 35 childrens' referrals were received in the first 9 months of the pilot. Of these, 25 children were registered, the remainder being outside the criteria of "children with complex needs who are likely to go on to use adult learning disabilities services". This level of registration gave Interest Link a large enough pool of children to work with while not raising the expectations of too many families, and accordingly no further marketing of the service was carried out.

A superb service. Easy to find, easy to access, referrals are straightforward, feedback is really quick on referrals.... (referral agency)

5. Assessment of Need

A high level of need was evidenced from feedback from children and their parents, partly owing to the lack of any similar services locally. Interest Link report anecdotal evidence that suggests a very high take-up rate (around 90%) among children informed about the service.

For me personally it's the first time that X has gone out and had an outside interest where I'm not involved. It's given her independence. It's quite a change (parent)

Families have been very positive about the opportunity; they see the increase in confidence and independence and it gives them an evening to themselves (referral agency)

My son has complex needs; he doesn't have buddies. It's lovely for him to have people to do things with - I don't need to be there. It's his friend not mine. He's never had friend before because I'm always there; it's important (parent)

I get a chance to do things that I like (service user)

Initial problems with inappropriate referrals have been successfully addressed: these mainly stemmed from differences in terminology: children are identified by schools and statutory services as having “complex needs”, and some children falling into this category do not have learning disabilities.

Basically what they (Interest Link) are doing is great. A lot of our guys are not able to access things people of their age would (referral agency)

An opportunity to explore what's more like a friendship - not somebody who is paid to be with you. This is much more informal...a lot of things are time limited or place limited. This is very person centred (referral agency)

6. Recruitment of Volunteers

Volunteers were recruited principally through press adverts and publicity, word of mouth and from among existing Interest Link volunteers.

Volunteers were recruited, trained and prepared for their role in supporting children using the processes developed for the adult and young people's services. These processes had been part of the overall good practice which had led to Interest Link Borders being awarded the Approved Provider Standard for Mentoring and Befriending Projects.

7. Links Developed / Support Provided

As of November 2010, with 5 months of the 19-month pilot remaining, Interest Link has made 14 children's befriending links, against its target of 12-16.

Befriending links took slightly longer to establish than in the Adult Service, principally because of the added responsibility felt by volunteers and the desire for caution on the part of parents.

Activities have been wide and varied, including swimming, going to the

cinema, walking in the park, shopping, having tea at a café, playing crazy golf, attending local shows and events, feeding the ducks and going out for ice cream.

8. Feedback from Participants

The comments from those who have been part of or who have observed the relationships established to date are very positive, particularly noting changes in the young people's confidence and interaction with others

It's just a change on behaviour for her... the way she behaves now...she's got an outside interest to talk about (parent)

She's more confident with me now. She was shy at first but the last couple of times she was chatting away and quite open (volunteer)

It's fun. I look forward to seeing her and to going out (service user)

Compared to our first week at dance class when the person I meet was very shy and didn't want to leave my side – the person now speaks to others in the class and does not depend on me so much (volunteer)

He was a very quiet lad; very reserved. He has started to come out of himself and do the things he wants to do (volunteer)

Interest Link is the best thing that has happened to X. It has given her confidence in life; long may it continue (parent)

For all of young people who have accessed Interest Link ,they have been positive about things. They have done new things and there is a noticeable difference in their confidence. They are prepared to go outside of what they were previously used to (referral agency)

Even after a relatively short pilot, participants already recognise the value of the service in providing a different kind of relationship for children and access to new opportunities. When asked about the implications of children and families not having future access to Interest Link Borders the following comments were received:

They (children) would lose the opportunities to do all of the things we've talked about – they would be back to not being out and about. It would be back to reliance on families (referral agency)

A massive reduction in opportunities (referral agency)

He wouldn't have anything would he ? He wouldn't have anything that would be for him. If he wanted to go out it would be with me (parent)

It would take X's independence; doing something outwith the family that's hers. Her sister goes out with her friends. It would take that away from her.....she would just be with her mum the whole time. I wouldn't even have time to sit down and read a magazine (parent)

The children themselves have also been very positive. When asked what difference it had made to their life responses included:

Going places was fun

We have a good laugh

I am happy to do things with [volunteer name]: because she is a young adult she understands me.

I now have a friend

When asked what they liked best about the link their responses included:

Enjoy myself

Doing things with [volunteer name], making things, watching DVD, going out, making cakes

Meeting [volunteer name], she's good fun

Case studies illustrating the relationships established in the Children's Service are shown in Appendix 1.

An extract of the results from the evaluation of the Children's Service shows that:

- volunteers all agreed or strongly agreed that the children they were linked with had improved in confidence during the link. The parents and carers had the same opinion as did referral agencies.
- volunteers all agreed or strongly agreed that the children they were linked with had improved in self esteem during the link. The majority of parents and carers and referral agencies had the same opinion.
- the majority of volunteers and referral agencies agreed that children had improved in life skills. Some parents agreed but others felt this impact was not relevant to their child

- volunteers who were undertaking physical exercise with their link believed the activities to impact on physical wellbeing. Parents of children in the same situation agreed.
- Volunteers and parents and carers and referral agencies all agreed that the links had a positive impact on the childrens' mental wellbeing
- Half of the volunteers believed their link to have an impact on parents and carers in terms of a break. The majority of parents and carers reported that this was the case for them and referral agencies also identified this impact.

9. Scope for Developing the Children's Service

The pilot service has been a definite success and positive relationships have been developed with all referrers.

Interest Link have suggested two proposals to develop the pilot

a) Increasing the age range of the service.

Some referrers have noted the need from families they work with for support for children who are younger than the 11-16 age range of the pilot.

Other befriending projects in Scotland often work with a younger age range of children than Interest Link's current lower limit of 11 (typically starting at 7 or 8), therefore there are well established models in other parts of the country using befriending with a younger age group (these are generic children's befriending projects rather than those working with children with learning disabilities).

On the basis of the above, Interest Link propose to increase the age range from 11-16 to 8-16.

b) Increasing the size of the service.

The pilot target was 12-16 befriending links and this was achieved by general publicity to local schools and statutory services to initiate referrals. Once sufficient had been received to meet the target, no further marketing was carried out. Clearly there is a larger pool of children with learning disabilities who could have access to and benefit from the service.

The Scottish Government's Statistical Bulletin of Pupils in Scotland 2009 records 62 primary pupils and 115 secondary pupils with learning disabilities in the Scottish Borders. Assuming these are distributed evenly between academic years, there should be around 112 children with learning disabilities in the 8-16 age range.

To lay the groundwork for a larger service Interest Link has also directly approached 5 primary schools that have a concentration of children with complex needs and all 9 secondary schools. Each school was asked how many children aged 8-16 would come within the criteria for the service. Interest Link report that 103 potential service users (including those involved in the pilot) have been identified in this way.

From Interest Link's experience in the Adult Service and Young Peoples Service, it is likely that up to 20% of children might have a very low chance of being linked because of the complexity of their learning disabilities or the presence of challenging behaviour or severe health problems.

Interest Link's experience would also suggest that up to a further 20% might not take up the service when offered it.

Taking the more conservative figure of the 103 children directly identified through the schools, it is reasonable to assume that around 62 children with a high chance of being linked would register with the service.

This figure tallies with the numbers of service users that would be expected from Interest Link's experience with its Young Peoples Service, which works with 16-25 year olds: There are around 7 registered service users

aged 16 and a similar number aged 17 and 18. This would suggest 63 children registering for a Children's Service spanning each of the 9 academic years.

On the basis of this demand, Interest Link proposes to increase the capacity of the service to 30 links, with a target of linking 50 children over three years, and this seems entirely reasonable if funding can be secured.

10. Summary

Interest Link Borders is a well established organisation which is highly respected locally and nationally recognised in its field.

Its development of services has enabled it to carefully and sensibly expand across a geographical area and across an increasingly wide age range of service users in a systematic way, with each development building on the experience and success of the previous one.

The work in establishing the Children's Service pilot was achieved by an existing staff team building on their locally based work, forming new contacts and adapting their practice to accommodate a new age group.

The feedback from referral agencies, volunteers, parents and carers and children alike has been very positive and points to an impact on children in terms of confidence and social skills as well as providing support within the wider family setting.

Interest Link Borders proposes a development of the pilot to ensure that a larger quantity of children can be supported and a wider age range have access to their service. Figures suggest that this potential group of service users is there and could readily be accessed through Primary and Secondary schools.

Mike Nicholson consultant for Befriending Network Scotland
November 2010

Appendix 1

Interest Link Borders Children's Service: Case Studies

These Case Studies represent links in the pilot stage of the Children's Service across all of the Interest Link regional branches. They include young people aged 11-16, based in Duns, Coldstream, Galshiels, Selkirk, Stow, Hawick, Carllops and Peebles.

CASE STUDY 1

The service user lives in a rurally isolated area but meets the volunteer in town at his grandparents' house. The volunteer lives about 16 miles away. The service user has no speech and uses a wheelchair. He has no friends who visit him. His parents recently bought him a garden shed so he could meet with his link in private. The volunteer visits fortnightly for 1-2 hours depending on the activity. Activities have included: storytelling (stories or what has happened to each other), reading with an activity book, finger, sponge and brush painting and decorating boxes, going for walks in the park, to the ice cream shop or a garden centre, making chocolate crispies, using autumn leaves to make a collage and sharing pictures and photographs of interest e.g. cars, owls. The volunteer is learning the service user's personal sign language and now has a box of options she keeps in her car for the service user to choose from when they meet.

CASE STUDY 2

The service user and the volunteer live about 6 miles apart. The service user has behavioural difficulties relating in groups which do not emerge in this one to one relationship. The volunteer's fortnightly visits last 2-2 ½ hours depending on the activity. Activities have included golf at a driving range, going to the cinema in Edinburgh, off road cycling, bowling, football and chatting about issues such as starting secondary school.

CASE STUDY 3

The service user lives with her grandparents, and the volunteer lives in the same Borders town. Due to the particular emotional vulnerability of this service user all visits are only in the home. The volunteer visits fortnightly for 2 – 2 ½ hours depending on the activity. Activities have included a makeover evening applying make-up with lots of girly chat, jewellery making, card making and a DVD evening.

CASE STUDY 4

This service user has been linked for 6 months with a volunteer. They meet fortnightly for 1-3 hours depending in the activity. The service user's own choice of a major treat is go to MacDonalds. These have been lively sessions with the pair really enjoying each other's company. In better weather they have been for walks and to feed the ducks at Tweedbank as well as popping into the park, and they have enjoyed little drives around town listening to the

service user's favourite music. The family are on a very limited budget and do not have a car and this is something the service user enjoys greatly.

CASE STUDY 5

This male service user has been linked with one of experienced volunteers for a few months now and the link is going very well. The service user's parents have noticed an increase in his confidence and pleasure in having someone only he sees to go out with. They have been out for tea a few times as well to play pool, visit the cinema and to go putting, as well as coming along to the Interest Link annual Friendship Day. This link works around the service user's own commitments with school.

CASE STUDY 6

This service user has very complex needs. She attends a school away from the home during the week but has now been linked with a younger volunteer who will visit her at home once a month for 4 hours so they can read books, do crafts, art, paint their nails and listen to music etc. This link is not able to go out in the community due to the personal care and medical support needs of the service user but service user and her mother are pleased with the home-based link.

CASE STUDY 7

This service user attended a Learning Support Unit and was referred by the Head Teacher because of his isolation at school, and the fact that he has moved house a few times in the Borders in recent years. Another factor was that he lives in a cramped flat and has two younger sisters. His parents and teachers felt that he would benefit from a volunteer so he could access community resources and fulfil his potential socially. The relationship built up by the pair going for walks to the park and to the animal enclosures. Soon the young person decided he wanted to go to MacDonalds and the cinema. He has now moved again and started high school, but the link is continuing and the pair are looking at places of interest in the service user's new home town, including Youth Centres and Ice-skating. The volunteer is a trained carer and the pair go out approximately once a month, around the volunteer's shifts.

CASE STUDY 8

The service user has been linked for 9 months. This link with a female volunteer has been especially suitable as the service user lives with her father and twin brother and a female influence for her has been very much needed. Together the pair have used local transport on many occasions around the Scottish Borders. They have been to Wilton Park, Hawick, Gala, Selkirk, for walks, shopping, swimming, lunch, coffee mornings, and they are now keen to go to Edinburgh by bus. They have attended all social events with their Interest Link Branch, including coffee mornings and the Friendship Day, and are both looking forward to our Christmas Disco.

The service user's father is extremely happy with the arrangement. As the service user becomes a teenager we will assess the link and the potential to concentrate on more constructive activities accessing local community resources, especially cookery which both she and the volunteer enjoy.

CASE STUDY 9

This service user was referred by her High School at age 15. Her mother hoped for a slightly older female volunteer for her daughter. This was achieved and the volunteer has been perfect as a mentor figure. The link have gone out socially to the cinema, to swimming and to the new IGNITE Dance Mat activity at Teviot Leisure Centre in Hawick. Here they joined a dance class for 10 weeks: the service user loves to dance, and this was the perfect activity for her to attend with support. They attended 10 sessions and put on a show at the end for her parents and family members. The service user was also offered a place in Interest Link's Young Peoples Service which she is loving. She will stay here for 2 years to experience group activities and deal with transitional issues. Her mother is 'over the moon' with the 2 services.

CASE STUDY 10

This 12 yr old boy was referred by Social Work and his link started in August 2010. Our intention was to go very slowly with this link and it has worked. The service user who has autism, has no current father figure at home and his mother wanted a male influence in his life as he was moving from Primary School to High School. The service user and volunteer have been out to play cricket and football and have gone swimming together. There is a plan for them to meet up with another children's link on an occasional basis.

CASE STUDY 11

This link began in June 2010 and the service user and volunteer go to the cinema swimming or shopping, with each trip linking with a café visit. Outings are monthly and last a few hours plus travel time depending on the activity. The child involved is chatty and outgoing and confident and has benefitted from an adult volunteer who has a similar personality. The parents, volunteer and child are very happy with this link.

CASE STUDY 12

This recent link began in November with visits to cafes, but with plans to go on outings to the cinema in Galashiels, swimming in Peebles, shopping, to museums & Megabowl in Edinburgh. Outings are being planned for every two weeks and will last as long as the activity requires. The volunteer and child bonded instantly and chat to each other easily, and the parents are very happy with the link.