



Learning Disabilities Befriending

2022 Impact Report Adult Service

*Proud of myself
getting out more
I feel good
can relax and be myself
made lots of friends
Feeling more confident
amazing new things to do
new skills
feel happy & wanted*

Our Aims

We were founded by family carers in 1990 and work across the Scottish Borders to improve the quality of life of socially excluded and disadvantaged children (aged 8+), young people and adults with learning disabilities and autism. We aim to provide opportunities for members to grow & flourish, and to provide respite for carers.

We achieve our aims through a peer-age volunteer befriending service delivered by 11 project staff and up to 200 volunteers, supporting around 200 members with learning disabilities annually. Staff are based in four local branches (Berwickshire, Central Borders, Roxburgh and Tweeddale) each with its own local committee of stakeholders and working with local schools, Borders College, Social Work and care providers.

Our service model has developed through regular consultation and includes traditional 1:1 links, befriending groups, school-age volunteers, overnight trips and in-school groups.

The longterm support we provide builds members' friendships, wellbeing, confidence, self-esteem and social skills. The regular respite provided improves family carers' opportunities for other activities, wellbeing and resilience.

We are open to anyone with learning disabilities (and those under 25 with autism) through referral or self-referral. The service is free of charge save for occasional small activity contributions. All volunteers are PVG checked and receive safeguarding training.

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.

Family carers have a role which is difficult to sustain, isolating, reduces their opportunities, affects their wellbeing and often involves financial hardship.

Adults (Ages 25+)

Activities October 2021- September 2022

All groups & 1:1s met face to face from October 2021. We continued social media and telephone calls and two Zoom groups throughout the year.

105 adults with learning disabilities were supported during the year. There were 50 1:1 friendships and 90 members were in befriending groups (some members had both). This provided short breaks for 75 family carers.

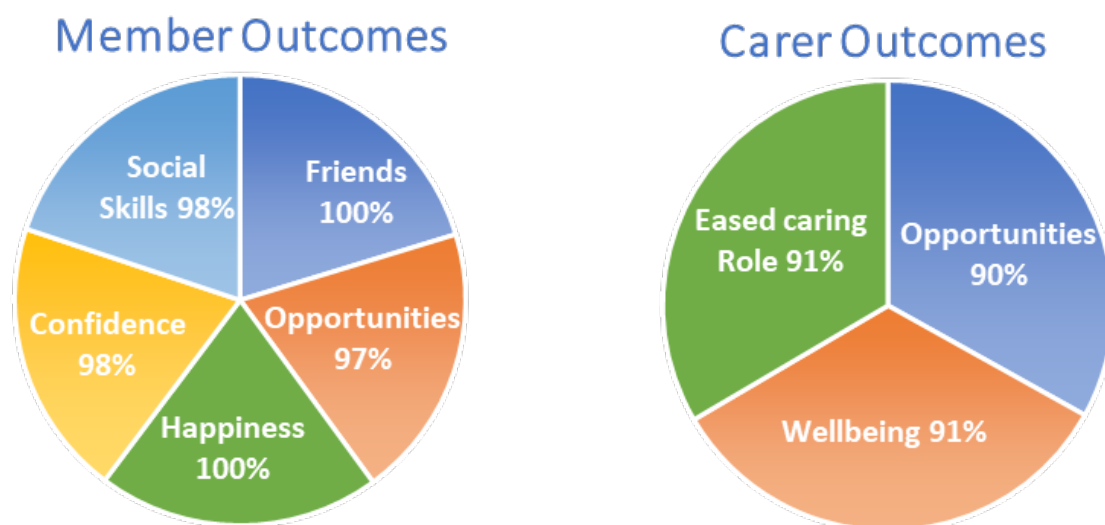
Four new befriending groups were started: a lunch club in Duns, an art & healthy eating group in Kelso, a Gardening & Outdoor Crafts group in Peebles and a young adults group in Hawick. This brought the total number of groups to 13

1:1 links met fortnightly for 2-3 hours and did a variety of activities including walks, going for coffee, shopping, playing pool, going to theatre & cinema, games & crafts.

Befriending groups met fortnightly on weekday evenings for 2 hours doing a wide variety of activities such as arts & crafts, cooking, drama, film-making, gardening, healthy eating, games, and parties. We now have 3 gardening-related groups, and their produce is used for other groups' activities. 2 groups put on theatrical performances for family and friends.

Family carers largely used the respite to spend quality time with their other children and spouses, but some met up other parents, went shopping or just had a rest, happy knowing their child was having fun with friends.

June 2022 Adult Service Outcomes at a Glance



Interest Link Borders June 2022 Adult Service Impact Survey

We surveyed supported members aged 25+, family carers and volunteers in June 2022, using accessible questionnaires deployed face-to-face, by telephone, online and by post. Coverage was 44% or higher (see below)

Main Outcomes:						
Impact on Members	More Friends	More opportunities	Happier	Improved Confidence	Increased Self-esteem	Better Social Skills
Reported by Themselves	100%	97%	100%	98%	96%	98%
Reported by Carers	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	95%
Reported by Volunteers	98%	Not asked	91%	96%	96%	87%
	Life Outside Caring		Helped Sustain Caring Role		Greater Wellbeing	
Impact on Carers	90%		91%		91%	
	Increased Learning Disabilities Awareness		More confidence making friends with people with learning disabilities			
Impact on Volunteers	93%		93%			
Other responses from:	Members	Family carers	Volunteers	Tutors	Care Professionals	
%age response of total	52%	61%	49%	60%	9	
Service still needed	100%	100%			100%	
Feel valued & supported by Interest Link	100%		100%	100%		
Has volunteering met your hopes and expectations?			100%			
Arts projects developed members' creativity	97%			100%		
Developed own creative skills				100%		
Safe and professional service					100%	

Links to feedback:

[Members](#)

[Carers](#)

[Volunteers](#)

[Care professionals](#)

[Tutors](#)

Selected Feedback: Members

Outcome/Theme	Quotes
1:1	Yes, I have met people through Roger who are interesting. I like when we went to Stobbs Camp with Jed Squirrel who knew lots of History stuff that was very interesting.
1:1	I really look forward to seeing Roger as we both like the same things and he has always interesting information to show me. I have been collecting old postcards off eBay about old Railways and have shown them to Roger.
1:1	I like seeing Lynne my volunteer. We go swimming and have lunch and have fun times with each other. I like the group and go in the bus from Jedburgh to get there. I like seeing my friends and doing things with them.
1:1	I like going out with John I am missing seeing him as he is having hospital treatment but he chats on the Rugby Banter Group and I ask him how he is.
1:1	I feel good and feel very lucky to have a friend in John he is very interesting and like to be with him he teaches me new things and interesting facts
1:1, Happiness	Yes going out with John makes me happy and I get to speak to John and Rob on the Rugby Banter Group so that makes me feel good
Confidence	Yes I feel more confident when I am with my friends I have enjoyed seeing people after Lockdown as I can spend time with them in the group. Friends reassure me and I feel good when I am around them
Confidence	Yes I am more confident, I like to meet people "stretching out my friends"
Confidence	It has made me go out and do different things that I would normally not do without mum and dad
Confidence	Everyone listens to me in the group
Confidence	Most definitely, before interest link there's no way I would have stood on stage and performed.
Confidence	I feel better but still need help.
Confidence	I have been very glad to get back to the group and feel more confident.
Confidence	Now I have more confidence to meet people
Confidence	I was very shy when I come but my confidence is better
Confidence, Social Skills	Yes, I feel more confident I do like to go out and about but I don't do it too often I have other activities through the day and yes, I like to talk to people but sometimes it is hard to express myself but I do my best.
Confidence, Social Skills	Yes when I came to the group at first I was very young and shy and didn't say much now I am very happy to speak to people and I have come out of my shell. I am very confident with lots of people.
Creative	This group has certainly helped me to learn new creative skills while using my own ideas.
Creative	Before Art Club I was just colouring in but now I'm trying lots of different things.
Creative	Im not very creative at all but when I'm at drama it just seems to flow!
Creative	We have done a lot of projects which have helped my created skills and imagination. Even puppets.
Creative	I'm learning to draw/create new things and I'm achieving things I didn't expect!
Creative	I'm starting to want to do creative things, stuff I haven't done before
Distance	Yes, I can come onto zoom myself for the Banter Group and Baking with my Mum. I like meeting up with Jill my volunteer walking and having a cup of tea.
Distance	I have fun when I am on zoom with all my friends
Distance	I enjoy the Banter Group and meeting new friends from everywhere.
Distance	Really enjoyed the Music Group, was a good way to see group members during Covid restrictions and always a happy group. Bingo was good fun too.
Distance	I go onto zoom with the banter group and meet and talk to new people. I have asked staff to support me to go on Baking Group.

Distance	Yes, I really enjoy it and the one I like most were the art group, the bingo night and the rehearsal of the pantomime on Zoom, all were good because I could see my friends and speak to all.
Distance, 1:1	I really enjoy my time and outings into the countryside with Val and Roger. When we were in Lockdown Roger supported me to think of questions for interesting people in Hawick about World War 2 and the Borders Railway. I was able to interview them on Zoom.
Friends	Yes definitely made friends. I like being with the group and meeting different friends like Jade Colby and Zoe the Peer Mentors
Friends	Yes, I made new friends and I am very happy to have them.
Friends	Yes I have met lots of new friends online and face to face in groups. I have a friend volunteer called John that I do interesting things with. I also have met new peer mentor friends whilst doing Panto.
Friends	I have a special friend in Wojciech
Friends	Everyone in the groups is my friend. :-)
Friends	I've made lots of friends.
Friends	I've made a lot of good friends but I can't see people at the moment because of my health.
Friends	I have made many friends at interest link and continue to make them as new people join.
Friends	I look forward to seeing my class mates.
Friends	It's a really good group & I have made lots of friends. It was good over lockdown because I enjoyed seeing my friends.
Friends	Some of the people I have met through Interest Link I am now doing other things with eg playing pool
Friends	It's nice to meet new folk in the group and have company
Friends	I have made lots of friends for a lifetime
Friends	I love going to Interest Link and making nice things, seeing my friends and having a blether.
Friends	love coming and seeing my friends - like drama and cooking as well
Friends, 1:1	I have made new friends through Interest Link. I enjoy meeting new people and spending time with Nan in the Golden Girls and new people at Drama at Buddies. I also have a friend called Janet my volunteer. I have known Janet for 20 years. I like being with everyone and am very happy.
Friends, 1:1	Yes, I have made friends with Roger my volunteer. I get on with him really well
Friends, 1:1	I look forward to seeing Janet my friend and she phones me on a Friday. We meet in the town for a coffee and shop. I also like going to meet other friends in the Drama Group
Friends, Distance	Yes I like all my friends at the Caledonian Group I like meeting new people on Zoom Baking
Friends, Distance	Yes I like going to my Tuesday Group to see all my old friends. I get the bus with Carmel the volunteer who travels with me to the group. I like the Baking group with Liz and Bakers and blether group.
General	Interest Link has been great, a big help to me.
General	Learning new skills and meeting new people has been the best
General	I absolutely love interest link. The zoom calls over lockdown that my whole family joined in on lifted all our spirits at such a dark time. Finally being able to see everyone in person has been the highlight of my year. I laugh from the second I walk into the building. It's a chance to leave all the serious stuff at the door and just have great fun. My favourite memory has to be how wonderfully Mary played the villain in our last panto "boo yersel!" I hope I get to continue at interest link for years to come.
General	I love seeing everyone having a lovely time lots of laughter.
General Quote	I feel good. I can relax and be myself with my friends. Dressing up and acting was fun I loved looking at all the photographs of us together having fun. I love Animation Workshop with Simone to she is great fun and I am learning something new.

General, 1:1	I love being in the group and on zoom with baking friends. I have enjoyed being out with my volunteer Barbara and miss her as she took me out of my comfort zone and I did things with her that I would have never done like exercise, I met her family and animals.
General, 1:1	I feel like I belong to a big family I feel really happy to be with my friends at Interest Link I have learnt more about cooking learning new recipes and learning new things with my volunteer John he is very interesting.
Happiness	Yes I feel very happy and good when I am with my friends and drama and Ollie and my volunteer Janet. I look forward to seeing them all as I can chat and be friendly with them.
Happiness	Yes, I feel happier. Yes, I like to be with Roger and do the exciting things with him like visiting old Railway Stations.
Happiness	Yes I feel happy I like my new I Pad and have learnt new skills and am happy to meet new people on Zoom
Happiness	Yes I feel happy when I am at the group and speaking to my friends in the group. I also get to see Sarah my buddy as she is in the group too.
Happiness	Yes seeing my friends makes me feel happy If I don't see them regularly I can get socially anxious. I trust them as I can speak to them and have a laugh with them
Happiness	Yes I am always happy when I meet new friends and also spending time with my friends in the Teenage Group. I like to spend time with my friends in the group they are all very supportive.
Happiness	Amazing
Happiness	It's great to hear from Catherine on the telephone.
Happiness	I've got more going on in my life and I'm getting out more now.
Happiness	I look forward to every session!
Happiness	Yes, I know I will be happy in everything we do.
Happiness	I would have been very isolated & lonely if it hadn't been for Interest Link over the past 2 years.
Happiness	Because I never used to go out much because of Covid but now I am
Happiness	Socialising is helping my mental health
Opportunities	Amazing things to do
Opportunities	We go to a lot of places in the car to castles and the beach
Opportunities	Taking part in a production
Opportunities	I am lucky because Joss has a car which enables us to do lots of different things out of our local area
Opportunities	I like doing different new things
Opportunities	I have always wanted to perform on the stage but never had the confidence.
Opportunities	"games nights bowling, movie night with others, music and games., bingo"
Opportunities	I didn't have any contact with young people. I enjoy meeting new people.
Opportunities	I have been able to join in a group and make a lot of different craft projects. The group is really inclusive for me.
Opportunities	I'm doing things now that I haven't done before
Self-esteem	Yes I like to do drama and Panto with Ollie and I am getting better at acting. I am proud of what I can do with everything. I like talking to my friends.
Self-esteem	Yes I feel good and very happy I enjoyed the Panto and learnt all my lines with Sarah Moffat
Self-esteem	Yes I achieve more when I am in the group as it makes me feel more comfortable and I have no fears.
Self-esteem	Yes I feel good.
Self-esteem	Yes it feels good it makes me feel like I have friends in lots of places.
Self-esteem	Yes, I do feel better about myself and find I can do new things.

Self-esteem	Yes I am proud of myself and how far I have come I can now act in front of people friends and family. I have learnt scripts with support and I don't feel so overwhelmed and shy
Self-esteem	It makes me feel good and my mum and dad are proud of me being Mrs Brown in Mrs Brown's Boys
Self-esteem	I like when we do shows as my mum and auntie Jacqui come to see them and they think we do a great job
Self-esteem	I love that my family can come along and see what I have been doing. My mum and sister came to see me in Panto they were very proud of me. I felt a good feeling
Self-esteem	I feel very happy and confident to see my family at the show or events.
Self-esteem	Very proud as my parents think Interest Link makes me feel happy and more confident. My parents like to see what I have been up to.
Self-Esteem	I feel like a valued member of the group and this makes me feel happy.
Self-Esteem	It made me feel good to help cook burgers at the barbecue and help out at the Queen's garden party.
Self-Esteem	"they all like me"
Self-Esteem	I see how valued I am by the group because my friends have been so happy to see me on Zoom and at the groups.
Self-Esteem	You've helped me see what I can do and what I can't do
Social Skills	"Yes I feel good talking to lots of different people. It feels easy
Social Skills	Yes I can talk and feel good at the group cos I don't worry about being embarrassed with my voice as people know me now.
Social Skills	Yes I feel I achieve more together with my friends I can talk to them easily as they accept me and value me as a friend to them. I feel they don't judge me and they are there to support me.
Social Skills	Yes I feel ok to talk to new people and people I know. I know John well and have good chats with him.
Social Skills	Yes, I can tell people what I mean in my own way and the best I can, I don't feel so shy as I was in the past.
Social Skills	Yes I am not so shy I am older and wiser I believe in myself and push myself forward.
Social Skills	As it helps my confidence and communication I chat to everyone.
Social Skills	Sometimes I am better at telling people what I mean
Social Skills	I'm getting better at talking to people because I have sometimes struggled to make people understand what I am saying

Selected Feedback: Family Carers

[Top](#)

Outcome/Theme	Quotes
Carer Opps	I can go a long walk at my ability level on my own or shopping
Carer Opps	Gives me a wee bit of breathing space when my son is at the groups.
Carer Opps	Able to play tennis with friends
Carer Opps, Family	It has allowed me to spend time on the things I like to do like swimming, a dance class and just relaxing in the garden. Spending time walking the dog also.
Carer Opps, Family	We enjoy our time when Elliot is away as a couple, we enjoy walking dogs and having a meal out
Carer Opps, Family, Wellbeing	Yes, we both enjoy the break and peace and quiet and we are able to recharge our batteries.
Confidence	He has, he's not as shy around people , just talks away now.
Confidence, Independent, Self-esteem	Yes, she has a huge amount of confidence now especially after doing all the drama productions and even more so the Panto. Sarah feels good about travelling herself on the bus to group from Jedburgh and phones Val when she is on the bus so she can be picked up.
Confidence, Self-esteem	Yes more confidence and self-esteem, always comes back from activities with a smile on her face
Confidence, Self-esteem	Interest Link has definitely helped him get some normality back into his life. The Drama Group with The Caledonian Group has given him more confidence.
Distance	During lockdown the phone calls were so important amid all the confusion and anxiety. Someone to laugh with and share with.
Distance	My daughter has not been able to go out since Covid as she is isolating due to her medical conditions - the phone calls from Catherine every week have made all the difference to her.
Distance	The groups have been a lifeline over the past 2 years. Because we were shielding at one point she couldn't leave the garden for 3 months, so her only socialising was done by Zoom. We would have been completely isolated . A lot of thought and organising went into fun activities and delivering all the craft materials. Could not improve on this service.
Distance	Keeping in touch through lock down with zoom was very import and helped us as a family
Distance	Baking has been a great success. The blended approach has been brilliant for Sarah as it has allowed her to be independent and use her tablet. She really enjoys online activities especially during lockdown when she was isolated. She always enjoys groups and is eager to go every time.
Distance	Online groups were superb during Covid although Gemma didn't join the baking group as it had too much going on at once for her – audio overdose! Was also good to be able to join a group activity without leaving the house but still feel connected to the world outside
Distance, Family	Love to look at Facebook and catch up with all the news from other members and families. A very good communication tool as well
Distance, Family	Part of WhatsApp group chat – lifeline during Covid. Good to share activities. Looked forward to daily messages of inspiration from Co-Ordinator, always something topical or uplifting
Family	It gives us a break from each other.
Family	Sometimes it's just being able to do the little things, like eating your dinner at night, knowing that your daughter is out enjoying herself.
Family	I can now arrange to go out for a meal with my husband
Family	Telling others friends and family Showing what she has made Feeling of pride
Family	We relax when she's at Interestlink
Family	It gives us something new to talk about

Family	It makes us all happy to see how much she enjoys it all, she looks forward to going, she can't wait.
Family	Just to see her happy and making friends makes us happy.
Family	To know he is enjoying himself without a member of the family being present we can relax
Family	"Love to come along and see what Sarah has been up to. Had fun watching all the productions especially the Panto to see how far she has come and what she can achieve
Family, Carer Opps	Lauren's dad and I get some time on our own.
Family, Carer Opps	Because Stephanie can dominate family time, it gives us time with our sons when we're not at work.
Friend	So lovely to see her reaction now that she can join in the groups - she has missed her friends.
Friends	It is a safe environment for my son. He has made friends in the group and enjoys the activities.
Friends	Totally Time spent in craft new activities Lots of fun and chat
Friends	Stephanie has made friends at Interestlink and enjoys meeting them there.
Friends	Yes, Sarah has made lots of friends. She looks forward to seeing her friends in the groups and online. This has made her feel good, and she also enjoys meeting up and speaking to all the volunteers.
Friends	Yes, it has created a safe environment for Elliot, and he has been able to spend time with volunteer Yvonne doing different activities on each outing. He has made new friends and especially met up with old friends that he has lost touch with
General	Interest Link groups are somewhere my daughter can attend without support. It is good for us both not to be together all the time and gives her the confidence she can cope herself.
General Quote	Definitely - each individual's needs and abilities are taken into account.
General Quote	Very safe environment especially with the challenges of the past 2 years. My daughter has high needs but everything is always in place for her. Very inclusive group.
General Quote	Interest Link is brilliant. My son is doing what he's doing, when he needs it.
General Quote	A highlight is that Nicola had a night away with Joss before the pandemic- this is something that she finds really difficult and still does. Joss has been great - she is very reliable and calm and Nicola totally trusts her. Many thanks to her and Mary and for the service that Interest Link provide- it is greatly appreciated
General quote	Sarah enjoys the banter and gets on with everyone in the group. She has become much more sociable and accepting of herself as she has always been shy and reserved as a young person. She gets excited to see her friends and tells us all the gossip on her return.
General quote	Interest Link has had a huge impact on Sarah's confidence she now travels independently and always feels safe with who she is with. Sarah is very happy and elated when she returns and is always in a better fettle after group nights.
General quote	The 1-1 and group activities have really helped Elliot he was becoming depressed during lock down because he is very sociable person and needed to get out and see people again.
Happiness	Gemma is always happy when she returns from group sessions.
Happiness	Elliot is usually happy when he returns home from 1-1 outings and groups. And is very keen to tell us all about his time away.
Happy	Definitely happier. He loves going to the groups.
Happy	Comes away really 'chuffed' with achievements and full of chat
Independence	It's helped our son be more independent
Independence	Helps with independence
Need	Bernodette cannot see people because of her condition and the phone calls from Cath are all she has.

Need	My son needs to go going out as it's not good for him to be sitting in the house. He needs to be interacting with other people and he can do this with Interest Link.
Need	Not many night activities in the area.
Need	Helps my daughter to improve her ability for social interaction and raises her mood. Not available elsewhere.
Need	Desperately needed Daughter really enjoys her time Plus NO other local opportunities
Need	Respite for us as it entertains Stephanie without our input. It gives a variety of entertainment that we can't provide.
Need	It is important my son has time away from me and my wife as I am in my late 70s.
Need	our daughter hs no other contact with anyone outside of the family and her day service provider. She never has an opportunity to go out in the evening with anyone and Interest Link provides her with a social opportunity.
Need	There are no other services which would enable my daughter to join their groups. Always inclusive, always accommodating to her needs. Nothing is too much - so welcoming.
Need	No other local opportunities
Opportunities	Creating a safe environment has given new opportunities
Self-esteem	This gives us both more time to spend doing what we like to do. Sarah has more self-esteem and believes in herself and her capabilities after learning all her lines for Panto. She is very happy and proud of herself
Social Skills	Acquiring new skills Ready to chat and have fun
Social Skills	"She can talk about something different after interest link rather than stay in her obsessional topics of conversation or by talking to herself. This is very good for everyone!
Social Skills	Yes, more interaction and laughing with her friends.
Social Skills	More prepared to communicate with others
Social Skills, Confidence	Yes, she was surprisingly confident to join in the Zoom sessions. I think she is letting her voice be heard more in the groups.
Sustain	Makes it a lot easier for me, and gives my son a break from me too.
Sustain	Simply connecting with people who care about the family unit
Sustain	Definitely, because my daughter is cared for at home, going to the groups means she and her personal assistants are away from the house and this helps everyone.
Sustain	Yes, it allows us to get some down time and feel more energetic

Outcome/Theme	Quotes
1:1	So far, we have had different activities, shopping swimming and going to Bud Club and having lunch. I enjoyed going out a longer day the most. Because we know each other so well, it does not matter if there is silence, or if I talk too much. I enjoy spending time with Elliot as it helps me relax.
Confidence, Social skills	Many members are very nervous and shy to start with and do start to come out their shell the more you interact with them. Some take more time than others but always a positive result!
Friends	Yes, I have been a volunteer and friend to Macauley for more than 6 years, a mere acquaintance has developed into very much a 2-way friendship of value to us both.
Friends	Yes, I feel good when I am with Gemma. She has a great sense of humour and I have a great rapport with her.
Friends	I have met a lot of people and I would certainly consider them friends and I hope to continue building on friendships into the long-term.
Friends	One to one links work best for me, with more in depth sharing and learning about each other. These friendships feel very special. However small groups can also be useful in opening up different perspectives, seeing each other in different situations, and getting to know the people in your friend's circle. I think there is a case for equal attention to both.
Friends	Yes. I have become very friendly with the person I support. I see him as a friend and not a person I support.
Friends	I consider my link a friend and enjoy our times together. I am sure he feels the same.
Friends	Enjoy the mutual friendship
Friends	When I meet up with my links it feels like meeting up with a friend.
Friends	"I've made good friends with other volunteers and service users
"	
Friends	Delighted to be invited to events outside (i.e. birthday parties etc.) by group members/service users.
Friends	The 'Motivators' Group is basically a group of pals who would enjoy simply being together. I particularly enjoy my weekly phone call with one of them.
Friends	Yes, I enjoy chatting and sharing stories etc. I value the friendships I have made.
Friends	I have loved making friends with them
Friends	I get a lot out of volunteering, my day job can be stressful and it's nice to be in the company of someone who takes pleasure out of viewing the world differently or enjoying simple things.
Friends	I enjoy the experience as much as my lady, we enjoy spending time together, look forward to our next lunch. Like any friend looks forward to regularly meeting a valued member if their family
Friends	I find my fellow volunteers to be warm, social and very friendly.
Friends	It doesn't feel like volunteering- it feels like a real friendship.
Friends, Confidence	On a recent residential it there was such great friendship between service users and volunteers. They supported each other to overcome fears to do indoor sky diving and their confidence rocketed.
General	Yes with new found confidence, social skills, and self-esteem Macauley has benefited from me being interested in his life's journey. Also, I encourage his interests for example in the railway and WW2/1. His confidence has grown vastly thanks to me introducing him to a whole variety of local key people and through his local radio appearance. I also enjoy contributing to Val's group on Residential and activities.
General	Yes, to them all I think Gemma has come out of her shell and much more confident with me. She always is happy and enjoys my company and I hers. She appears to be happy and

	wants to go out again together. Gemma`s social skills are good with me I understand her sign language and gestures and we seem to get along quite nicely.
General	"Happiness Elliot has really struggled throughout the Covid Pandemic. All his weekly activities stopped, and he had no contact with peers. I think going out doing various activities during this period as a link has added to his happiness. Even now his weekly activities are what they were two years ago I think Elliot enjoys spending time 1-1 going out to different places. Elliot gets more confident going out, paying for himself, making decisions which in turn boosts his self-esteem. We have known each other for a long time but through our 1-1 contact I am getting to know him better.
General	"Happiness: C appears to be content with his lifestyle. He shows concern re his family and obviously supports his mum and relatives. Confidence: In the early days of Covid Vaccination C was very nervous re getting an injection. Using softly softly approach I was eventually instrumental in him plucking up the courage to get jabbed. Similar support from his mum and Val ensured his eventual confidence. Self Esteem: I feel C has more interest in looking after his personal hygiene and appearance. Social Skills: Compared with our initial relationship C`s social skills have developed greatly. He has been involved in interviewing me and been on local TD9 Radio about his interests. At which he spoke with eloquently and had great appreciation for everyone and confidence.
General	"I hope that by taking Jade to coffee shops etc I promote her social skills, and thereby increase her confidence
General	She is VERY happy to spend time with me & trusts me enough to discuss various things with me
General	The time I spend with Stephanie and Megan is important to me. I`ve made great friends of them both and we always have a good laugh. It`s a time to switch off from all that`s happening in the world and on life and just concentrate on our time together. It`s great to see the relationships grow and I look forward to many more memories being made.
General	Every session is lots of fun and a barrel of laughs! What motivates me is knowing how happy each session makes the service users and the fact that interest link may be their only opportunity to socialise and make friends whilst feeling comfortable.
General	"Being able to make a small difference in Nicolas life, being able to do a variety of activities. I feel I have also gained in confidence since I started volunteering and feel I'm giving something back to the community. I enjoy seeing the growth in Nicola in many different ways. And that we have similar interests, so we both always enjoy the activities we do, like clip and climb, go ape, going out for walks. And have many more planned. "
General	"Volunteering with Interest Link has been such a positive experience for me. My family and I are richly blessed. It is so worthwhile to give some of my time to those less fortunate. In the early days of volunteering 16 years ago I was humbled by Cathy's enthusiasm for the little things in life. I have so many wonderful memories. Tribute concerts at the Eastgate Theatre. Cathy sat enraptured and on one occasion left her seat and started dancing. The Silver Band concert where Cathy was asked by the band leader if she would like to conduct the band. She knew all the numbers the band was playing. Very recently we were out for dinner to celebrate Cathy's Birthday. The joy on her face when her sweet and sour chicken arrived was a joy for me to see. There have been sad times too since Cathy lost her husband. I am glad I am able to give her extra support when necessary. "
General	I just love it. I feel happy and having fun in the group is beneficial to all.
General	I love the social aspects of the group, having a chat and catching up with everyone. I truly enjoy volunteering. It is as much for me as everyone else.
General	Volunteering with Interest Link has been humbling. It not only is rewarding, fun and interesting but reminds me of what I have.
General	I think that Interest Link plays the most important role in their service users' life. They have a lot of benefits from the service provided. At last friendship and happiness, breaking

	barriers is the best benefit for all of us: People (service users), Volunteers and also community.
Independent	Megan particularly has come on hugely at the gym. She can now get herself set up on the machines and can follow a short programme without much input.
Independent	More communicative and relaxed.
Independent	I've seen a difference in all of these areas with Nicola. She's a lot more confident, when out she'll happily order her meal with very little support other than me just being there if she does need help.
Independent, Confidence	Opened up in sessions, opportunities to produce art/drama themselves, confidence during Covid sessions increases resilience.
Praise for staff	Very much so. Mary and Rosa are so supportive in keeping me abreast of upcoming activities.
Praise for staff	Kate keeps in close contact by txt WhatsApp E-mail & phone.
Praise for staff	Stefanie is an absolute gem. Her job means so much to her as do her clients. She is always at the end of the phone when needed day or night.
Praise for staff	Angela's approach to supporting volunteers is much more inclusive and the club nights are much more fluid she always has lots of 'things' up her sleeve but also values the socialising aspect of the club so allows time and space for people to mingle, chat and reconnect
Praise for staff	I know that if I have any questions I can text or email Mary and she'll support me through them.
Praise for staff	"I know I can get in touch with Mary Mouat any time. I was so impressed with the support given to volunteers and service users alike during lockdown Lovely letters, activities, etc."
Praise for staff	Very much so. Rosa is very caring and understanding. I love you all.
Praise for staff	Angela always readily available for help. I get good positive feedback
Praise for staff	Staff always receptive and helpful. They go above and beyond what is expected of them.
Social skills	Lauren will initiate conversations with volunteers and now no longer solely communicates via her support person
Social skills	During the pandemic we maintained contact through weekly phone calls. At first the phone calls were one-sided. It felt as if my friend needed to tell me things as quickly as possible before saying 'goodbye' and putting the phone down. Over the weeks we began to have more of a conversation; as well as answering my questions about her week she would ask questions about mine. I think she realised that phone calls could be used for more than being 'checked up on' and making appointments. However there were times when she started to repeat herself and from what she was saying I thought it best to limit the length of some of our phone calls. She was quite happy when I said that I had to go.
Vol Awareness	"Yes, enormously. What I have learned is that everyone is different and struggle with a range of problems just like those without learning disabilities. I don't pre-judge anyone with a learning disability who I meet after having volunteered for Interest Link because I've discovered there is such a wide range of disability. Each person with a learning disability is first and foremost a person, and as such, they deserve equal respect. I don't presume anything, I just enjoy getting to know them as themselves.
Vol Awareness	Yes, on reflection I feel C's greatest challenge will be when he has to accept a greater responsibility for all aspects of life. I am aware of his vulnerability, and I hope he is able to build a supportive circle of friends to ensure he remains mentally and physically healthy.
Vol Awareness	Yes it makes me much more aware of people who are vulnerable
Vol Awareness	I like the way the world is viewed in a simpler, non-judgemental way by people with learning difficulties.
Vol Awareness	I think it's only once you're out and about with someone with learning difficulties do you realise how many barriers are in place.
Vol Awareness	During the Covid pandemic and its consequences I became more aware of the barriers adults such as my friend who lives in sheltered accommodation face.

Vol Awareness, Vol Confidence	Yes, prior to volunteering through lack of exposure to service users I was unsure how to engage with them. I now fully appreciate they are just wanting the same things in life as everyone else, but face more challenges to achieve this.
Vol Confidence	Yes, I have learnt to be more relaxed, and nothing phases me.
Vol Confidence	Oh yes, for all the reasons above. I don't feel uncomfortable at all, like I did in the past. I take the cues from them, relax, and see where getting to know them leads to. I'm open-minded while being mindful of any possible vulnerabilities. I would also check we were staying safe and feel confident about this too. The biggest aspect of making friends with someone with a learning disability is to be yourself with them.
Vol Confidence	Yes, I am better able to communicate with people with learning difficulties, and do not shrink away.
Vol Confidence	Yes as the more experiences I have with them the more I learn and adapt to and gain confidence throughout.
Vol Confidence	I think I have found it easier to understand all their individual needs by being a volunteer and attending a group situation.
Vol Other impact	I enjoy seeing the reaction on Gemma's face when we go out and have fun this is what keeps me motivated and want to do more to make people happy.
Vol Other impact	It gives me energy.
Vol Other impact	I thoroughly enjoy my experiences with both the young people, staff and volunteers. It is a great mix of people and a pleasure to be part of the team. I always look forward to seeing everyone.
Vol Other impact	Seeing someone develop and change, grow more confident and assertive, whilst also having some fun. They are good company and I hope I'm the same for them.
Vol Other impact	The satisfaction at the end of the day knowing I have made a difference to someone's life and that I have helped their mental wellbeing as well as my own.
Vol Other impact	I like helping and supporting young people. We all have such good fun
Vol Other impact	Yes! Volunteering with you for five years motivated me to do my NHS Social Services at college.
Vol Other impact	Volunteering is rewarding, especially working with members with learning difficulties.
Vol Other impact	Motivated to 'give back'. Enjoy the energy the sessions give the service users and volunteers.

Outcome/Theme	Quotes
Confident	We have noticed that it brings them all these skills and makes them happy and confident.
Confident	Seen more confidence in people attending groups.
Distance	Great varied activities for all people especially during lockdown looking out for friends and other staff members.
Distance	Really good and varied and all members and carers look forward to online activities and groups.
Distance	Staff are new members to Facebook but enjoy the concept of being part of Interest Link and seeing how other members are getting on with all the activities on offer. iMessages to staff from staff at Interest Link also helps to keep us informed with activities and days out and all organisational information to do with this.
Distance	Great Facebook communication as Nan gets to show her niece who lives away the photos of her at activities and what she has baked.
Distance	Great we have two members of staff from Mears Care on Facebook and we love it to keep updated and we enjoy Caledonian WhatsApp chat also
Distance, Friends	Huge impact right through Lockdown. Members mental health has improved this would have dipped if they couldn't get to see their friends and be online. Conversations, Games and activities have been crucial
Family	Families members came along to activities with the group members. The activities gave the family something to do together, while also easing the responsibility of setting up and organising the activity themselves. Carers had the change to chat and members befriended one another. Being outdoors in the community garden received very good feedback as to helping with wellbeing, and feeling good after spending time in the greenspace participating in activities with the group
General	All our service users that attend groups all really benefit from this service, being with friends and doing different activities.
General	No other services have offered what Interest Link has it has been vital.
General quote	It has been great to see old groups back up and running and new groups starting up. All the clients I work with enjoy and wish to continue attending interest link groups. We have one client in particular, whose introduction to interest link has had a huge impact on his life. His confidence and happiness have been positively impacted, particularly with the introduction of a befriender and with a new group to attend. In time this will hopefully strengthen social skills, relationships with new friends, routine and healthy cooking - as well as mental health wellbeing.
General Quote	Fantastic keeps all the members busy. Staff go above and beyond with all variety of Groups, and interests such as Drop Off Bags and Online Baking Art, Banter and Music Sessions
Happy	One service user very much enjoys going to the groups and always has a big smile on his face! He appears to have gained confidence in the group. Another service user has just started but appears to be enjoying it already.
Praise	All Covid precautions were to a very high standard, and I was made to feel safe and comfortable during all of the sessions. The service is professional, but without being too intimidating at all.
Praise	Interest Link is a great group for all - the environment feels very safe, laid-back and comfortable and the service users looked confident.
Praise for staff	Rosa is an excellent group leader. Her enthusiasm and approach to all the members is fantastic. It is a pleasure having Interest Link in the community garden and is great to be supporting a group providing these opportunities for families
Praise for staff	I have found Angela to be very helpful and willing to engage with me

Outcome/Theme	Quotes
Confidence	My memory of the most recent project is seeing all the team blossom. I also recall several years ago when one team member didn't even enjoy drama, for this project she shared the lead role. The most enjoyable aspect was EVERYONE participating and being valued for what they are and what they bring to the table. Everyone's uniqueness was included in the production
Creative	Over the last 8 years I have worked with the same groups, running both drama and crafting classes, and I have noticed that participants have gained confidence in all their skills. 1. They are more confident using craft tools, such as scissors, paint brushes and glues. 2. They are more confident in applying craft techniques, such as drawing, painting, folding and cutting. 3. They are more able to listen and follow craft instructions, such as folding paper to make a basket. 4. They are more able to think creatively and have creative ideas, such as choosing colours and, 5. They are more able to try out new skills. Each class we try different skills, and participants are happy to wait until the day to know what we have planned, and then try the activity.
General Quote	I know that what I do within the group is appreciated, I know that the members look up to me and want to learn from me. I get a great deal of enjoyment from working with the members as I love seeing people achieve when sometimes others haven't given them the chance
General Quote	I hosted 13 sessions across a 1 year period, following the lockdown period. The happiness I observed from the group reunited was a true pleasure to see. It was clear to me how valued Interest Link is to these participants. I feel the gardening sessions we offered improved confidence in outdoor activities and craft and people had the opportunity to learn more skills, and the group bonded well socially
Praise	I feel more than valued, I am allowed to take the lead and am trusted that my ability to complete a project is good enough
Praise	I can't tell you enough good things. They are brilliant. Supportive and champion me as much as the people they support
Praise	Mary and Rosa are always very supportive in practical matters such as helping with the large groups and they were also very supportive when we worked together during the pandemic. I feel they respect and value my work and I enjoy working with them.
Praise	I thoroughly enjoy working for Interest Link with Mary and Rosa.
Tutor Creative	I have been challenged personally throughout recent projects, I have been able to create a unique project and certainly pushed to find creative answers to the challenges presented. But I am glad of the opportunity as it helped me grow as a person
Tutor Creative	I learned from them some really great stories and techniques
Tutor Creative	I have been able to develop my creative skills in: tutoring groups with varying abilities and disabilities, tutoring service users and volunteers, tutoring over Zoom during the pandemic, creating activities for groups with varying abilities and disabilities, creating activities for Zooms, creating activities that are new and fresh each time.
Tutor Creative	I enjoy being a creative tutor with Interest Link because I get the creative freedom to write activities for the groups to try. I enjoy getting to know the participants and seeing them grow in confidence. I enjoy getting to know the volunteers and carers. I enjoy the camaraderie of the groups, there is always a lot of laughter! I LOVE seeing everyone's finished piece of art/drama work and how pleased they are with it.