



interest LINK
BORDERS

Learning Disabilities Befriending

2022 Impact Report Children and Young People

*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.

Children and Young People (Ages 8-25)

Activities April 2021- March 22

Once lockdown ended, 17 1:1 links met fortnightly for 2-3 hours for community activities such as going for a walk, doing arts & crafts, sightseeing or shopping. During lockdown, contact had been by Zoom, telephone or social media, and many links continued this contact after physical meetings were resumed.

We ran 15 befriending groups across the Scottish Borders, with a total of 84 places for members. These met on Zoom and social media initially, but started to meet outdoors from June and indoors from September. In March 2022, we started a new community group in Duns and an in-school group at Langlee Primary.

The 9 community groups operated much like mainstream youth and adult social groups, usually with a 50:50 member to volunteer split. They met fortnightly at community venues for 2 hours on a weekday evening to do activities of their choice such as arts & crafts, drama, film, gardening, music, cookery, games and outdoor adventures.

The 6 in-school groups met at lunchtimes for 50 minutes for games, arts & crafts & healthy eating. They reached members not able to attend community groups because of health or personal care needs or living very remotely.

We supported a total of 98 children and young people during the year. 14 were new to Interest Link or had not received a service the previous year.

June 2022 Children and Young People's Outcomes at a Glance

Member Outcomes



Carer Outcomes



Interest Link Borders June 2022 Children and Young People's Impact Survey

We surveyed supported members aged 8-25, 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	97%	92%	95%	97%	97%	100%
Reported by Carers	100%	100%	97%	92%	92%	92%
Reported by Volunteers	96%	Not asked	91%	91%	86%	95%
	Life Outside Caring		Helped Sustain Caring Role		Greater Wellbeing	
Impact on Carers	92%		97%		97%	
	Increased Learning Disabilities Awareness		More confidence making friends with people with learning disabilities			
Impact on Volunteers	100%		96%			
Other responses from:	Members	Family carers	Volunteers	Tutors	Care Professionals	
%age response of total	44%	47%	45%	59%	N/A	
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	85%			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 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
Confidence	Feel more confident in myself.
Confidence	Yes this group has helped with my confidence as it has proved that I can make friends
Confidence	I can go places
Confidence	Coming to the group has helped me feel more confident about making new friends
Confidence	More confident, doing things I have never done.
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, Social Skills	It helps me talk to people
Confidence, Social Skills	Yes, happier talking to people 😊
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	I used to not like my photo getting taken but now im abit of a poser, ha.
Creative	Has made my creative skills better.
Creative	Drawing things helps me get new ideas
Creative	Art and drama helped me get new ideas
Creative	The animation project - I made an alien invade Blob planet
Creative	I have enjoyed crafts which I did not before. I even work on my own at home. Colouring and cutting. My parents have noticed a huge change in me doing this.
Creative	Drawing & painting
Creative	Panto I would like to do it again.
Creative	My mum and dad loved the panto and were very proud of me. My brother and sisters came along too.
Distance	When I was attending the group I got a lot from it. Speaking to a volunteer on the phone during lockdown really helped me.
Distance	I feel happy. I like doing arts. My favourite memories are baking with Debbie in lockdown and doing the quizzes with Craig. I felt happy that I could still meet people even though it was lockdown
Distance	I always enjoy Interest Link. I'm glad we are meeting together in Peebles again, although the Zoom sessions were good fun and we made lovely crafts with Mandy on Zoom.

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 really enjoyed meeting the group online as I was able to see my friends more regularly. We learnt lines online and supported each other.
Distance	I learnt my lines for Panto and everyone supported all the group when we practiced on zoom
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.
Distance, Friends	I have made friends on zoom and in the group meet up with a friend adeline also, my 121 link. I enjoy doing the quizzes I'm going to meet up at the cricket club
Distance, Opportunities	Doing the quizzes on zoom and arts and crafts meeting new people laughing at Debbie and Lloyd baking on zoom
Friends	Made a lot of friends
Friends	Yes, this group has helped me make new friends
Friends	I have made new friends at the Youth Group
Friends	I enjoy making new friends at Youth Group
Friends	School friends and new friends
Friends	I have made lots of friends, who I like to laugh with
Friends	Have made friends and have had a laugh
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, 1:1	Yes, I have made friends with Roger my volunteer. I get on with him really well
Friends, Distance	Yes, I have made new friends at the Cooking Buddies Class, and I like going with Frances my volunteer. I also come onto online baking sessions with Liz I have met some new people on there that do zoom with me. I like Baking.
General	Makes me feel happy, wanted, like everyone cares about each other. Always felt safe in the group. Encouraged me to get involved with things that have then been successful. Bowling, going to Wetherspoons and for walks have been my favourite activities. My birthday party stands out as all my Motivators friends were there. I like the talking in the groups and catching up with each other. Helped me get on the course I am doing now.
General	My favourite memory was I fly! More trips! Some more baking at youth group. I like coming to groups because I have great times!
General Quote	Good I feel good when with other people it gets me out of the house and doing different things
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 Quote	I really enjoyed the Panto and doing the IT stuff especially feeling important in the real live Heart of Hawick Theatre with the professionals. Panto and acting
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 fell happier because I have friends that I can trust
Happiness	Happy doing everything at Interest Link
Happiness	Because i see my friends and I do fun things
Happiness	Yes, feel happy because I am bored sitting doing nothing at home
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 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, Family	Yes I feel happy when I am at the group. I walk round from home and come to every group. I tell my mum and dad what I have been up to as well. They like to hear my stories.
Inclusion	Meeting Interest Link friends outside the group, going to the cafe and playing computer games with them
Opportunities	Socialising more. I've enjoyed going to Wetherspoons, bowling and the drama.
Opportunities	Doing lots of arts and crafts and bingo too
Opportunities	Drama, Rib boat ride and Berry picking
Opportunities	Cooking with my friends
Opportunities	Meeting people like myself who understand me. I do gardening at Cans and lots of arts and crafts.
Opportunities	Indoor sky diving and going away with my friends
Responsibility	Yes I feel more confident in my new role and have made a whole load of new friends. I attend YPS Group and also a Junior Sessional Worker in the Children`s Group. I had a great a chance to be on TD9 Radio with Graham Ford and Interest Link Roxburgh. I feel I have been tested with all the new things in my life since leaving school. Interest Link has offered an opportunity to take more responsibility and support younger members and being a good role model.
Responsibility	Yes I do as I have been working with Charly and Joe from Love Drama and feel very important being a support to the younger group members. I am responsible for writing an Invoice and do a lot of IT in the group and with the tutors. I feel very important
Responsibility	Yes my social skills have got better since school. I speak to lots of people and like to do lots of different things that interest me. I show good example to younger members. Being a Junior Sessional Worker I have become more responsible
Self-esteem	I'm treated like an adult
Self-Esteem	I feel important and liked

Self-Esteem	Yes this group has made me feel better with myself because I believe in myself more
Self-Esteem	People respect me at the Youth Group
Self-esteem	The group makes me included/welcome without judgement. I love the social interaction and chat within the group.
Self-esteem	I feel wanted and enjoy chatting ...make it each week it would be great
Self-esteem	Yes I like all the activities we do and was very proud of myself when I did acting with the Panto. I did a good job.
Self-esteem	I feel good when I do cooking and get better at it as it is my favourite thing to do, and I like eating it.
Self-esteem	Yes I mix with people I went to school with or on the Radio with and like to meet new people. Yes I feel I have more self -esteem I feel good about myself and what I have achieved so far. I relate to lots of people of all ages.
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 did a good job and am enjoying the new animation project. I like being with people I know in the group.
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 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.
Social Skills	I have found interest in chatting to others
Social Skills	I find it easier to talk to people
Social Skills	I talk better with my friends
Social Skills	Yes I definitely get my feelings across, moreso now.
Social Skills	Given me confidence to talk to others and helped my communication skills.
Social Skills	I can say yes or no to someone
Social Skills	I can tell Kate what I mean
Social Skills	I can speak out in the group
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 talk a lot more in the group and have fun with everyone.
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	I am more chatty and responsible and like to chill out with friends. I like to try lots of new things.

Selected Feedback: Family Carers

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Outcome/Theme	Quotes
Carer Opps	I take a yoga class while my child attends the group
Carer Opps	Time to spend with my daughter . Me time. Shopping time .
Carer Opps	Respite to unwind even for a short time. I enjoy going for a swim/sauna.
Carer Opps	Can spend quality time with daughter
Carer Opps	Yes I can take my 2yr old for a walk before bed. I can also visit my other family members
Carer Opps	Gives me a couple of hours to catch up with friends or just have time to myself
Carer Opps	I can go out with friends, I can go shopping
Carer Opps	The service gives me time to myself, to get on with my own work.
Carer Opps	When our son is at Interest Link we have time to do things for ourselves. It is a blessing.
Carer Opps	I have been able to meet up with a friend and go walking with them
Carer Opps	I have some me time
Carer Opps	It is much needed precious time and I am very grateful
Carer Opps	We often ask a friend round for an undisturbed catchup or visit them
Carer Opps	It is really useful. We use the time to go to the gym, catch up on housework or just relax.
Carer Opps, Family	I spend time with Liam's younger brother taking him to dance classes.
Carer Opps, Family	Spend time with the younger children and their homework.
Carer Opps, Family	By the time my daughter goes sometimes I do activities with my other daughter like bake, play a game, read a little or prepare thing for the next day.
Carer Opps, Family	I enjoy having time with my grandchild and catching up with family members. I also get to do all the things I need to do.
Carer Opps, Family	Yes I have had time to rest after being ill and have time to myself knowing that Olivia is very happy.
Carer Opps, Family	I like resting and spending time with Kacey's dad and sister. We know that Kacey is happy and look forward to her coming home with a smile on her face.
Confidence	Such a big difference in my sons confidence he has really came out his shell. Always enjoys himself and can't wait for the next session/group.
Confidence	Before Poppy attended, she was very quiet and shy. Since attending, she has come right out her shell
Confidence	Bags of confidence. Alexander has great pleasure in telling us and showing us what he has done. He likes displaying things he has made in his bedroom. This is a new thing for him to do.
Confidence	Yes, Jackson is more confident and always wants to stay as he likes what he does and all the craft activities.
Confidence	My daughter gained more confidence and self-esteem as a member of the group and she enjoys a lot be part of them
Confidence	Yes, I think Paula is very much more confident and is happy when she knows it is group night. Paula is able to express herself even although she doesn't speak she will use signs to get her message across.
Confidence, General Quote	Yes, I find that Liam has gained a lot of confidence and social skills and it definitely makes him feel happier. Especially when he is given a responsibility or a job to do.

Confidence, General Quote, Self-esteem	Yes Declan is definitely more confident and has more self -esteem. He is very friendly with other group members and able to say what he feels in a comfortable situation.
Confidence, Independent	Yes, Niamh has more confidence and very independent when choosing what she wants to do with Frances.
Confidence, Self-esteem	Yes Haiden has more confidence this is clear because he wants to go back and gets ready for the sessions excited to go in the taxi and see his peers of all ages. He has more self-esteem as he has come out of his shell and expresses to me that he is happy and had a good tie at the group.
Creative	Yes, he has told me how he found acting fun and has loved Charly`s drama workshops
Creative	Paula loves all the sessions but especially likes Drama and really enjoys getting involved. I watch the videos ad look at the photos on Facebook and enjoy seeing them and liking the posts. Paula also enjoys Wild Woods and doing outdoor activities in the fresh air.
Distance	Niamh comes onto Liz`s Baking online sessions and gets very involved. She requires a little support but again is very independent.
Distance	Declan really enjoyed himself when he was online he got to know the technology and was really good using it. He really enjoyed learning his lines for Panto and doing different activities.
Distance	My daughter did some of the online activities like art and groups and she really enjoy it special the art, the bingo night and the pantomime rehearsals online she was always ready for it.
Distance	Olivia has got involved in all sessions and enjoys being with all members from Interest Link. Olivia has the skills now to go online herself and has respect for others when on. She just feels very at home with it all.
Distance	As I said above the online sessions with Chloe were brilliant and baking and banter groups kept her going and Bingo to.
Distance	I am personally not on Facebook, but Niamh is, and she loves to catch up and tell me what`s happening if it is anything important.
Distance, Family	I really enjoy Facebook as it is a way of seeing what Jackson has been up to.
Distance, Family	We are very happy with Facebook and enjoy looking at the posts. It is very good for showing us what has been going on and reminding Declan of groups and dates and activities.
Distance, Family	This has been a great thing during Lock down and beyond and is great for information
Distance, Family	Yes, the media platforms is been amazing for me it makes me fell more connected with the organization and with all the lovely work you do in all the groups and has been a pleasure to be part and for my daughter to be part of it too.
Distance, Family	Definitely, yes. The Facebook page is really good for the whole family and its great to get updates about what`s been going on.
Distance, Family	Yes, I receive messages from Val and Matthew Blair`s brother is very involved in Interest Link Roxburgh`s Private Facebook Page. He shows Blair and I all the photos.
Distance, Family	I love to catch up with Facebook videos and photos and a great way to pass on information and share info also. Great success and also like to see what all the other young people have been up to.
Family	Seeing Christopher so happy making new friends and being more independant has given the whole family a boost

Family	He looks forward to the time he spends with Befriender and loves talking about what he has done when he returns
Family	They come home chatting, laughing and smiling
Family	No but Becca puts videos up on Facebook with Jackson on them and I love to watch them.
Family	Yes Declan always comes home chatting and excited what he has been doing in the group
Family	Paula always tries to show us what she has been doing and I enjoy Facebook to see the Tik Tok Videos and photos, especially all the memories of what they did during lockdown and before.
Family	Kacey always tells us what she has been doing and Interest Link have involved all the family members during lockdown with baking and banter groups. Kacey and I look at Facebook posts with videos and photos and love all the stuff that we can get involved with.
Family	I enjoy time to myself doing things that I like and catching up and know he is always happy what he is doing also.
Family	I really enjoy coming along to open nights with Liam's dad and brother.
Family	We love coming as a family to all the special nights, outdoors at Wild Woods and all the drama productions and shows. We love watching how far everyone has come and Declan's performance and how confident he has become.
Family	We both think this is a great thing to see how she is progressing
Family	I've been invited to the parent's evening events and I never miss one I will remember all with great love because it's been the achievement of all their effort but the most amazing one was the pantomime it was the reunion of the confidence all the group have on each other all over the years since Mrs Brown and never the less the other events in the woods it's wonderful, amazing I don't have enough words to say how pleased I am that my daughter is been part of this fabulous group
Family	I really enjoy coming along to see what Blair and his friends have been up to. It is great to come along with relatives and be part of the special evenings.
Family	We just love to come and see all the drama productions that Olivia is in they are fabulous and so proud that she has opportunities for people like Olivia to get involved in and to shine.
Family, General Quote, Wellbeing	It is great listening to my child tell stories about her time at the group and she gets excited days before she attends the next session. If she is happy it makes home life a lot easier
Family, Wellbeing	Yes it has I am very happy Paula was able to keep up contacts with goody bags delivered and all the posts on Facebook kept us all going. When Paula goes to the group I know she is happy and this makes me happy.
Family, Wellbeing, Carer Opps	It's been good to do other things even for a short time I can use my time with my other daughter or to myself.
Family, Wellbeing, Carer Opps	Yes. When Olivia is happy I am happy and it gives me time to spend with other siblings in the family. It has given me the confidence to seek other ideas for Olivia to get involved in.
Friend	Definite yes. Our son considers every member of the group to be a friend. He loves coming home and telling us what the group have been up to.
Friends	I am pleased my son now has a social life & made friends.

Friends	Yes, it's been amazing for my daughter have friends and fell confident in an environment that now she know well and is always happy to be ready to go, to have fun.
Friends	Yes it has created a safe environment for Olivia to meet and catch up with her friends. If it wasn't for Interest Link Olivia would only not see her friends of similar age. Olivia enjoys catching up with all group members and they have all become very close over the years. Olivia looks forward to group nights and online activities.
Friends	It makes her feel part of the group and valued with her friends
Friends, Happiness	Paula is just happy to do things. She loves crafts and always enjoys bringing what she has made home for us to see. Paula enjoys the taxi ride and also catching up with all the group members.
General Quote	He is a flight risk but is calm and settled at the group
General Quote	Absolutely, we have complete trust in Rosa and all the helpers. We are so grateful to you all.
General Quote	My son has been sent packs during covid for things to keep him busy and also stuff to include the whole family, I'm also benefiting through the group by growing fruit and vegetables through muddy buddies which I enjoy
General Quote	Keep the club going it's fun, educational and emotional support. Also the parents can relax while kids are at the club
General Quote	Thank you so so much !!!
General Quote	Mary and Rosa lead a marvellous group, invaluable to Peebles and implement a quality much needed service, the jubilee crafts magical
General Quote	I just think you do a super job and I'm so glad Poppy has somewhere to go that she really enjoys. Your nights are always fun and enjoyable for her. We would hate for them ever to come to an end.
General Quote	He loves his telephone chats with Alex and hangs around the phone waiting for his call! Alexander loves the gardening activities at Cans and the cemetery area.
General Quote	Paula likes meeting with people and gets excited when she knows her friends are going to be there from school. Paula's social skills have improved. She is able to say how the session has been and always is happy to go.
General quote	She gains: confidence, friends, self-esteem, a time for herself with friends, she develop new skills and learn new things for her future, be independent.
General quote	Olivia has grown up with Interest Link and made her the person she is today a confident kind and happy young person. It has given her the opportunity to get involved with other things with support.
General quote	Without Interest Link Kacey would sit in the house and do nothing and that makes her very sad. She is a very sociable girl and loves to be with people so she can tell everyone what she has been up to. Kacey really enjoyed her one to one online sessions with student Chloe when she did Arts and Crafts with her on a Thursday evening every week. She really looked forward to the contact she had with that.
General Quote	Blair always comes home chatty after group telling me everything he has been up to. I also see Sarah the group's Sessional Worker as she is an escort, and she tells me everything he has been up to.
General quote	It's been amazing see my daughter interact with some friend she gain through the years and I will repeat again in the pantomime the confidence she and all her friends have in each other to do that amazing show I need to say a big thank you to all the people involved all over the years and in all the other activities that were present to all of them.

General quote	The 1-1 and group activities have allowed Olivia to grow and be more confident. Olivia would never have been part of a drama production. Interest Link has given Olivia a huge amount of opportunities to shine and be more confident and happy with herself. She is accepted and enjoys being kind and thoughtful to all her friends.
General Quote, Friends	He calls everyone his friends and is always very happy to see them all and spend time with them. He chats to everyone and wants to hear about how they are all getting on.
General quote, Independence, Distance	Niamh has some independence from family which is difficult to achieve without help from Interest Link. She thoroughly enjoys herself with Frances her volunteer and she enjoys them both doing things that Niamh want to do. Niamh loves cooking classes and online cooking with Roxburgh and Liz. She has fun and interacts very well with others
General quote, Responsibility	I think Liam has gained friendships and social skills and he feels great when he is given responsibilities with the younger members.
General Quote	Such a positive group always there if you need anything or help with anything 
General Quote	Thank goodness for Interest Link !!!
Happiness	Yes the service has created a safe environment for Liam as it helps his mental health and wellbeing and being outdoors. Liam can become quite anxious.
Happiness	Yes Declan feels happy in the group and we know he is always kept safe. Declan really enjoys meeting his friends as he is very sociable.
Happiness	Yes it has created a safe place for Paula, I know she is safe and very happy with her friends and group. She is very happy with volunteers also. She likes to get picked up in the taxi and always looks forward to the group.
Happiness	He is happy and smiley when the group is on. Haiden speaks to his friends and is happy to see them at the group as he lives at home with me and I think getting out and about is good for him.
Happiness	Haiden is full of smiles on his return from group night. He is very sociable he likes being with people and has joined in with activities.
Happiness	Olivia has enjoyed the time she spent with Barbara her volunteer and did very different things with her. Olivia comes back from group elated and happy to tell us what she has all been up to.
Happiness, Family, Transition	Yes, it is a safe place for Kacey, and she just loves to come along to the group and it makes her very happy when she is about to go. Kacey loves chatting to us when she comes home. Kacey left school last year and really misses her friends at school as she was in the school group with Becca. Kacey has had no provision and Interest Link is the only provision she has to get out and enjoy herself and socialise with friends. It is brilliant she has it.
Inclusion	I think the service is very good for my daughter's wellbeing and gives her a sense of having a peer group.
Inclusion	Jackson really likes all the people in the group. The young peer mentors from a different class is a great idea for all to mix.
Inclusion	It gives a chance to develop relationships within the group and is an important part of his social life. Meeting people within the group has helped develop other opportunities out with the regular group meetings which make big difference.
Inclusion	Blair really enjoys his wee group and always asks when it is and what time he is going. Blair really likes being with his friends and classmates at Lunch Group with Becca.

Inclusion	I think the group is inclusive and it helps Haiden by promoting his independence away from me. He is very happy to go and happy when he comes back from the group.
Inclusion	Either directly or indirectly, it has given him the opportunity to develop other activities out with the group and led to making friends and building relationships with people that he wouldn't have been able to otherwise. It has been invaluable.
Independence	Because our son spends time with Interest Link this allows him a bit more independence and he loves telling us what he has been doing at the group.
Independent	Niamh has just been lucky with an opportunity to volunteer at The Almond Tree Café and Interest Link has helped Niamh to be more independent, have more social skills and is very happy when she is with people who she chooses to be with.
Independent	Liam has definitely learnt to be more independent and gained skills with Interest Link.
Independent	He is much more confident happy and able to be independent as he now walks to Interest Link Groups himself to Burnfoot Hub. He is very happy about himself and is very happy with his situation.
Lunch	Yes, Jackson really likes his Lunch Club with Becca.
Need	There are very few inclusive clubs/groups for children with disabilities in the area. This is the first club where my child feels valued and included.
Need	There is no other groups that suits my sons needs.
Need	Support with social activities.
Need	It gets my son out and about and socialize which he really needs
Need	Social interaction/ communication and friendships for my son. So important for his well being.
Need	Our son has a Befriender with Interest Link which a lifeline for our son and so valued by him
Need	There is very little in the community to allow people to get together for social development!
Need	No other social evening opportunities
Need	For our son to interact with others his age
Need	My daughter struggles to be part of a group but at Interest Link she is totally included in the group and absolutely loves going every fortnight.
Need	We need the social opportunities that ILB provides
Need	My supported person loves it...when she attends.
Need	For support very few services available
Need	Socialisation for my daughter
Need	No other local opportunities close to us
Need	Yes. It's a great environment and Ryan always looks forward to going. It provides opportunities that don't seem to be available anywhere else. Everyone is welcome and Ryan feels part of the group.
Need	Without the group Kacey would have nothing to look forward to. Kacey is really looking forward to joining the Teenage Group after summer. She loves Drama and can't wait
Need	Yes, it has really helped.us during lockdown Elliot only had 1 hour a week when he was away on a walk with a carer
Opportunities	Many friends at IL & lots of different experiences

Opportunity	My son enjoys the opportunity to meet and spend time with old friends
Opportunity, Need	At present only opportunity for my son to get out and mix safely without me.
Opportunity, Need	There are no other clubs that my daughter can meet her friends at
Opportunity, Need	There are few social opportunities locally for young people with learning difficulties.
Opportunity, Need	There are no other groups like Interest Link for our son in the local area. Interest Link is fabulous and especially during Covid.
School	He really likes his lunch group time.
School, Friends	The groups at school and in the evening has had a huge impact on Blair's life it is the only way he gets to meet his friends out with school. His friends are very important to him, and the group is a way in which he can see them and spend some special times with them doing lots of exciting things with them that they all enjoy.
Self-esteem	He feels valued and listened to by his Befriender
Self-esteem	Linking our son with Befriender has helped him feel valued and I appreciate Interest Link being there for his Befriender
Social Skills	He speaks more animatedly and lists who was there that he knows
Social Skills	She still struggles with communication and social skills but they have improved
Social Skills	I think my daughter's confidence and communication skills are improved by healthy social interaction.
Social Skills	Far better, taking his turn at speaking in a group and involving other people. His social skills have really come on well.
Social skills	yes more Social Skills and very much happier
Social skills	The most epic event was the pantomime in January she really was amazing and of course all the group it was the most wonderful show I had see and so well organized well done everyone you are fabulous.
Social skills	Yes, Blair is much more confident and yes more Social Skills definitely. Blair feels very happy chatting to everyone in the group.
Social skills	Olivia is always happy to attend the group and catch up with all her friends. Olivia has gained more social skills by being in the group with communication, respect and toleration for other people in the group.
Social Skills, Confidence	Yes Kacey has more confidence and she is able to tell us what she has done at the group and full of chat about what she has been up to. Kacey is accepted and enjoys other people's company and misses her friends from school so much.
Social skills, Happiness	Kacey is able to communicate her feelings and has improved with her social skills. Kacey is always very happy getting excited about going and very chatty and happy on her return.
Sustain	Even just a few hours a month has really helped as we know our son is safe and enjoying himself
Sustain	Eased and sustained, given us a breather to recharge our batteries
Sustain	Since attending Interest Link Poppy's confidence has grown and my anxiety and worry about her happiness has lessened so I think things have become easier all round.
Sustain	Yes, always for so many years a big thank you to all.
Wellbeing	Definitely as i know how much enjoyment my son gets from the group. Gives me a lot of reassurance.

Wellbeing	Gets Dan out and gives me peace of mind so I can relax
Wellbeing	It's always good to know that my daughter is out with her peers, having a good time. And it gives me time to get on with what I need to do.
Wellbeing	Our son is so happy to spend time with his Befriender and we are happy he is so happy
Wellbeing	The kindness and support Poppy gets at Interest Link is evident in her when she comes home. She's always happier on those Mondays so that makes us happy too!
Wellbeing	We do not feel so stressed when our son is busy at his groups and we have time to ourselves.

Outcome/Theme	Quotes
Confidence	I have seen varying changes in the many members with learning difficulties that I have both seen and interacted with over the years. But the biggest changes I have seen in any member have been in Robbie. When I first met him in the children's group he was unsure of both himself and the group and didn't always seem the happiest in the groups but now (and I mean right now, as I write this) he is extremely happy, flying around the room socializing with everyone and is extremely confident in almost everything he does.
Confidence	I think that it has made a difference to members of the group as the things we all do together you can see that their confidence is growing. The way they interact with each other gets better as we do new activities.
Confidence	Yes, it makes them a lot more confident in the groups that I support. Members look forward to attending the groups. They feel confident with the tasks and activities they all are involved in.
Creative	One of my favourite memories as a Peer Mentor was when I was supporting members with the Panto.
Creative	I really enjoyed being part of the recent Panto with YPS Group. We performed the show in January but started in August. It was lovely to see how committed they all were and how they took on their different characters. I enjoyed even the Zoom rehearsals. Everyone just simply enjoyed themselves and the show was great.
Creative	The Panto was the best ever activity.
Friends	When I miss a group members ask after me. In between youth group meetings we have good chats on WhatsApp.
Friends	I definitely feel like i have gotten to know the members and that i volunteer with very well and i get on with everyone really well but i don't think I've been seeing them long enough yet to become good friends.
Friends	Over the 5 years I've spent working with Interest Link, in many different groups of varying size and personalities, I can honestly say that I have made some true and impactful friendships that have seriously changed my life. I have met that many wonderful people through Interest Link and I will always be thankful for that opportunity.
Friends	I haven't really made many friends outside of school so it was nice to meet new people, especially spending some time with Jemima. I've gotten to know her a lot more and am looking forward to meeting up with her next time! I find I have become more confident in social situations.
Friends	I have made a lot of friends
Friends	Yes, seeing everyone regularly gives us the chance to really connect with the members and create real friendships.
Friends	Yes, I have been here for a lot of years. I have made strong friendships with members over the years. It has been nice to see them grow and mature into lovely young people that they are now.
Friends	Yes, I have. Made really good friendships with everyone.
Friends, Social skills	I feel like over time the members have really opened up with me and we can chat really well.
Happiness	There is always lots of laughter and talking in all the sessions in which they all join in.

Happiness	Yes, they seem all very confident and happy, and they are very comfortable to speak to each other. I think the group members are very happy to enjoy all the activities and keep coming back to sessions as they enjoy them.
Social skills	Improving turn taking in group discussions and activities. With guidance developing their listening skills.
Vol Awareness	Members feel comfortable talking to me about the barriers such as living in a rural area they face which I had been unaware of.
Vol Awareness	I think I was quite naive to not so much the barriers, but how much people with more severe learning disabilities can achieve by themselves still and I love hearing from members about things they have done that they're proud of.
Vol Awareness	My knowledge definitely has increased about the subject of learning disabilities.
Vol Confidence	When I began I was a little awkward but as I met and got to know them all that went away.
Vol Confidence	Yes, I am very happy spending time with people who have learning disabilities.
Vol Confidence	Yes, I would feel more confident about making friends with people with learning disabilities in the future.
Vol Confidence	Yes, I would feel very confident to make friends with people with learning disabilities in the future. I have friendships now with people in the groups I support.
Vol Confidence	Yes I would be very happy to continue being friends with all members in the group
Vol Other impact	I haven't been volunteering for very long but since I started I feel like I have improved in my own confidence and going to volunteer always makes me feel really happy
Vol Other impact	I really enjoy getting to spend time with all the members, I love getting to help everyone and possibly making them feel a bit happier in themselves.
Vol Other impact	I love seeing the members become more confident and become more comfortable with me. The group feels very casual and supportive and is great for me as well even though I'm a volunteer.
Vol Other impact	It has been a great experience and I'm very glad that I did it.
Vol Other impact	I really love getting to be a part of Interest Link and everything it does.
Vol Other impact	I feel happy to be with the young people and do all the activities to. I have enjoyed supporting the children and helping them to be more confident. They all seem very happy with and have fun together.
Vol Other impact	I have always thought about being a Special Needs Assistant and my careers advisor helped me to find appropriate experience.
Vol Other impact	Yes, I very much feel more confident joining in new things with people I don't know.
Vol Other impact	Attending group sessions are really energetic and fun and the members just have such a good time that it allows us all to chill and just enjoy what we are doing.
Vol Other impact	It makes me feel happy, I enjoy attending groups, it is a great opportunity, and we have a great setting for our members at Burnfoot Hub. It is great.
Vol Other impact	I feel very happy and responsible to be helping and supporting people in lots of ways.
Vol Other impact	It makes me very happy to volunteer and help other people.
Vol Other impact	Yes, I do. The members are very grateful and thankful for all the volunteers' input, and they show it. The support is thorough, and things are all amazing.

Outcome/Theme	Quotes
Consult	Currently doing a wonderful job and we are delighted to work alongside Interest Link. Keep doing what you're doing!
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	Absolutely! Young people feel nurtured and very much cared for by the staff. School staff enjoy a positive relationship with IL staff and liaise with them frequently about the young people/families they work with.
General quote	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.
General quote	Interest Link is a great group for all - the environment feels very safe, laid-back and comfortable and the service users looked confident.
School	Focus and attention in class and confidence to ask questions in class; pupil worrying less about getting academic work "wrong" and being more positive about their learning
School	A great project and has allowed the children to do something we would have liked to have done ourselves but not the staff/ resources/ knowledge to do.

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
Consult	Just keep doing what you are doing
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.
Creative	They were introduced to a range of art processes which all fed into one larger piece and this, in turn, evolved to complement and become part of a musical performance. Creative skills were developed and wider connections / links were introduced to enable a multifaceted experience.
Creative	They have been so involved in the photography side. Even those that don't like to have their photo taken really got involved
General Quote	100%. I change my activities to fit the needs of the group but I have learned I can make them far more complex than I first imagined and the group's capabilities are very strong – just in different ways to those without a learning disability.
General Quote	Yes absolutely. I have never worked with such amazing people before!
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 can't tell you enough good things. They are brilliant. Supportive and champion me as much as the people they support
General Quote	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.
General Quote	Kate and the volunteers were very supportive and easy to work with.
General Quote	Again, super welcoming and complimentary about my photos so far
General Quote	I thoroughly enjoy working for Interest Link with Mary and Rosa.
General Quote	Really lovely team and group of participants, hope to work with them again soon.
General Quote	Keep doing what you're doing, it's fabulous for members and tutors alike
General Quote	Very valued and feel like part "of the team"
General Quote	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

General Quote	Absolutely! I feel like my work with the group is appreciated and respected. Everyone is so welcoming and supportive and always engage 100% with the activities. I always leave confident, happy, and like I have done a good job.
General Quote	I love the camaraderie of the group. Everyone chats to everyone and helps each other out. The staff, members and volunteers also really know each other well which is just lovely and quite unusual to groups I've worked with before.
General Quote	It feels lovely to sense that I am one of many people helping to make an difference. I am loving being involved with them via Interest Link.
General Quote	Very humbled that they are enjoying my activities. I also feel incredibly valued and happy. I always feel supported and that I can ask questions if I need to.
General Quote	Please let me work with you forever ha ha! Just keep the support up, the fantastic ideas and the enthusiasm. You all do such an amazing job and it is a pleasure to work with Interest Link.
Social skills	<p>It is wonderful to see various individuals smile and open up as they get to know me. Just asking "what are we making next week?" shows their enthusiasm.</p> <p>It was especially wonderful to see how patiently they all waited, that week that a few new ones were getting a little left behind. Then Jade piped up to repeat some instructions for one of them!! Shows how much the sessions help their social awareness, kindness and confidence. Demonstrates that many of the skills gained are not necessarily about the baking, although there is clearly great pride in that too.</p>
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	Yes, I had the opportunity to develop my own creative skills in a new context with individuals with a wide range of learning differences who also varied in age.
Tutor Creative	I had a great time and really benefited from creative contributions from the participants. I also gained more experience and skills by using video making software for the project.
Tutor Creative	Finding locations for shoots and realising the vision everyone had has got me learning more and being creative
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.
Tutor Creative	I particularly enjoy the symbiosis and opportunities for learning that accompanies any new project with new people especially those who learn differently. Memories include the different personalities involved and the fun everybody had and that the facilities at Abbey Row were perfect for that particular project.
Tutor Creative	Yes, I have to be creative with my choices and my teaching style to make sure everyone can join in

Tutor Creative	It has been an amazing opportunity that I have really enjoyed. Gives me a buzz in the planning and during the sessions. So lovely to see the clients having such a positive experience.
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	Yes! I have been challenged in the most wonderful way to research and come up with different ways of presenting activities to suit the needs of the group. The requests given to me from Interest Link are superb and I thoroughly enjoy coming up with ways to make them happen!
Tutor Other impact	I particularly enjoyed watching some of the participants gain confidence and enthusiasm from the project.
Tutor Other impact	I have loved coming along to Interest Links. Meeting everyone has been amazing, so kind and welcoming. Running about in the dark with smoke grenades was brilliant. The night we had Shrek and the rock was class, the wind was so high Shrek nearly flew across the playing field 😁