

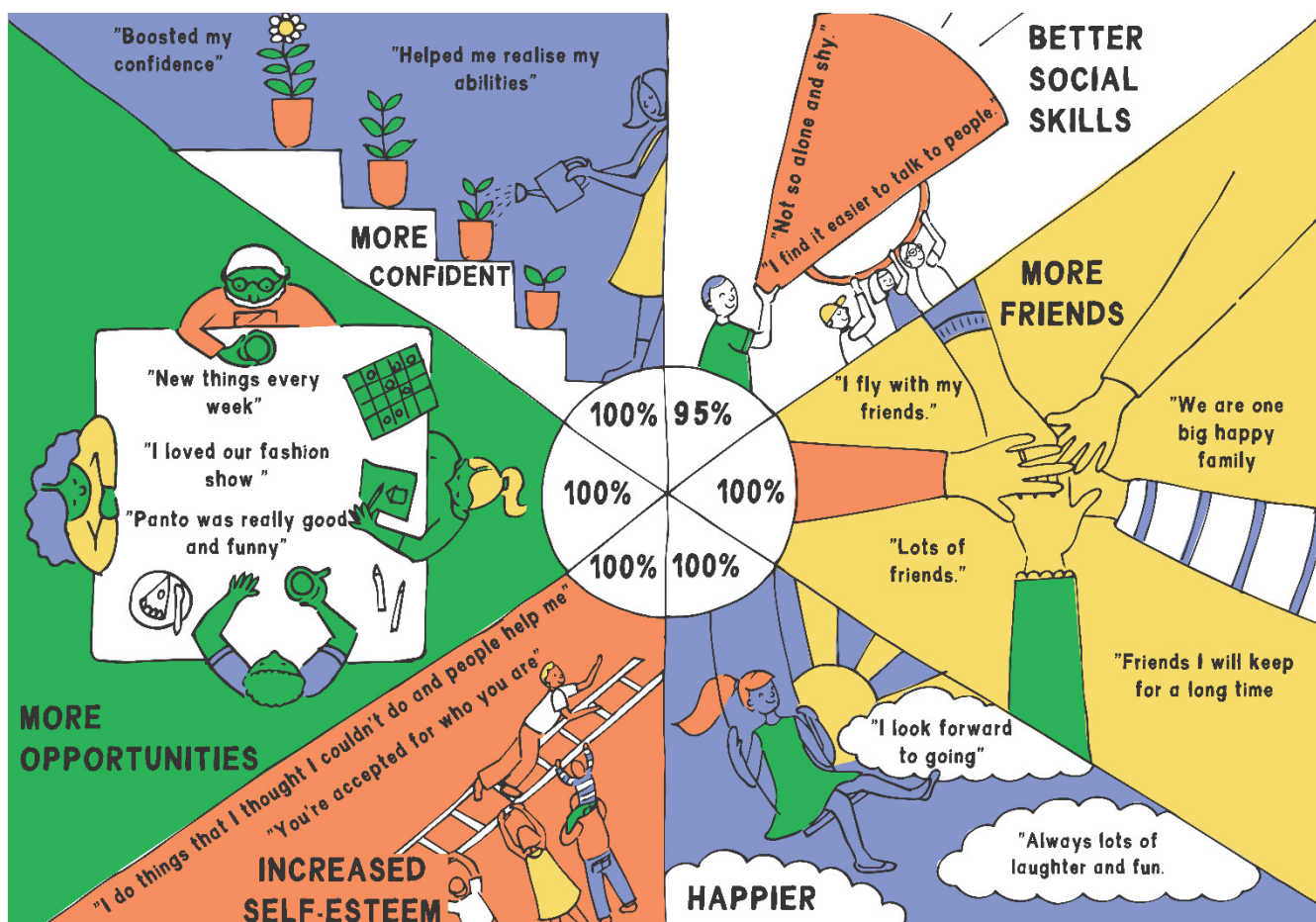


# 2025 Impact Report

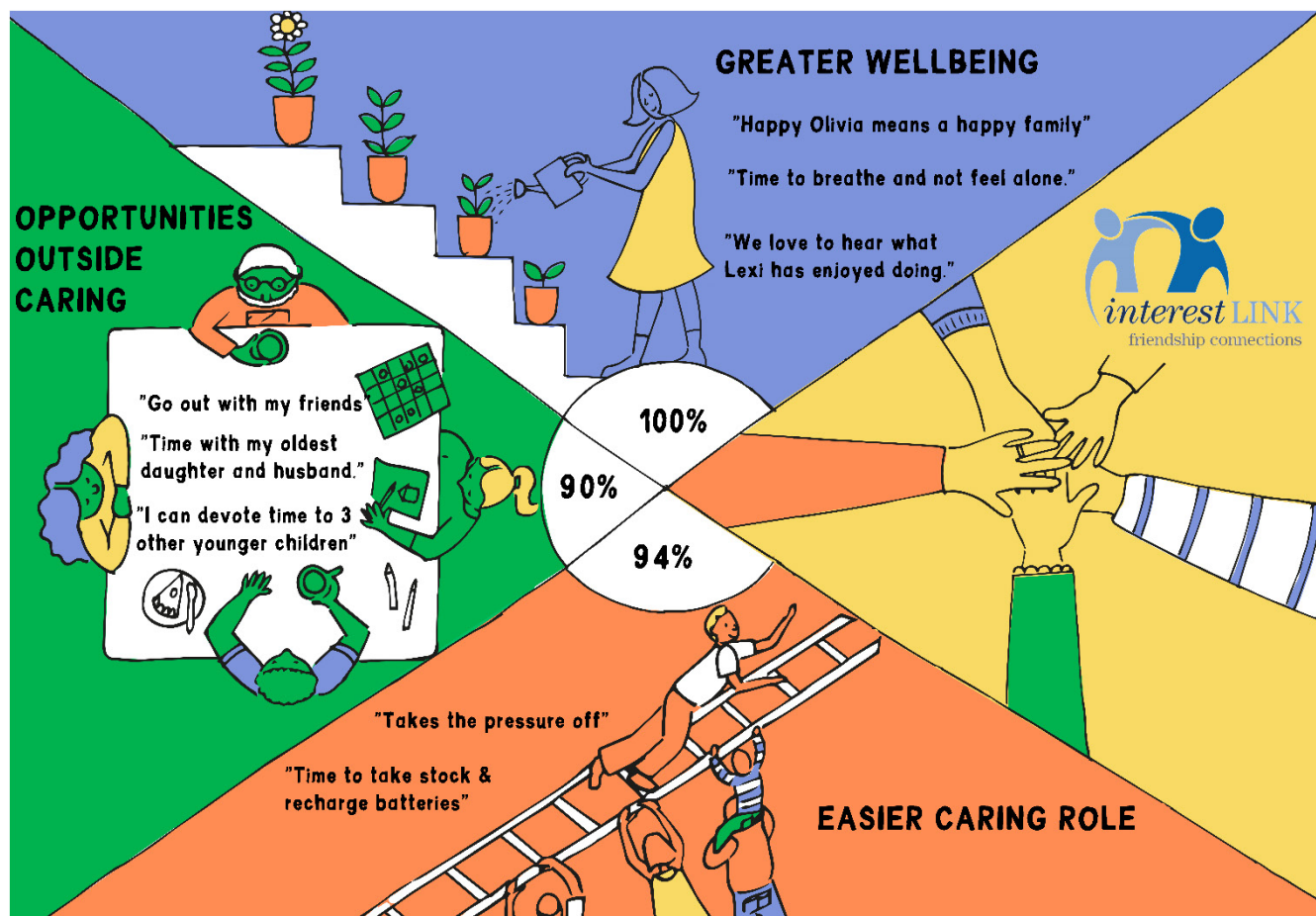
Adult Service: Ages 25+

always feel welcome  
lot of laughs  
accepted for who I am  
makes me feel happy  
one big happy family  
I realise my abilities  
always look forward to it  
exciting  
**Best friends**  
boosted my confidence  
love to chat now

## Members with learning disabilities said:



## Family carers said:



## **Our Aims and Activities**

We aim to improve the quality of life of socially excluded children (aged 8+), young people and adults with learning disabilities throughout the Scottish Borders. Our volunteer befriending projects overcome social barriers and provide fun and accessible opportunities, experiences and friendship networks on a longterm basis. They develop the qualities and skills needed for independent living, volunteering and employment and give regular high quality respite to family carers.

Our peer-age befriending for all ages is a very direct and effective route to improving social inclusion and our service is unique in the UK for its variety. We have 315 members of whom 265 are currently supported by 220 peer-age volunteers in 41 befriending groups and 45 traditional 1:1 links. Groups meet in community venues, in-school and on Zoom, and activities are similar to mainstream groups, including arts & crafts, drama, lifeskills, journalism, gardening, music, cookery, keep fit, games and overnight trips. 305 family carers benefit from regular respite.

We were originally founded by Berwickshire family carers in 1990 and now deliver through four branches (Berwickshire, Central Borders, Roxburgh and Tweeddale) each with its own experienced staff and local committee of stakeholders. They work with local schools, Borders College, Social Work and care providers to reach as many people as possible.

## **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.

They are socially excluded throughout their lives: Most are taught in additional needs units and lack opportunities for friendships and activities 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 5% a job. They are at risk if they go into the community on their own and there are almost no mainstream community activities they can access.

Family carers have a role which is difficult to sustain, isolating, reduces their opportunities, affects their wellbeing and makes them twice as likely to live in poverty.

The need for community involvement, friendships, and activities that are fun and enriching comes out loud and clear from the members and families we work with, and this is reflected in the feedback below.

## Adult Service Activities 2024-25

At August 2025, we are currently supporting 133 members with learning disabilities, up from 123 a year ago. We have 154 places in 25 befriending groups (compared with 147 in 23 groups last year) and 3 new groups are planned for September 2025. 1:1 links have reduced from 39 to 35, continuing the gradual shift of focus towards groups. 70 members have both a 1:1 link and a group, or were in two or more groups. 85 family carers enjoyed short break respite. Around 100 volunteer befrienders have been involved during the year.

New groups started included:

- A Drama group in partnership with Borders Youth Theatre
- An Artful Numeracy group aiming to improve maths and money-handling.
- A walking group (Woodland Warriors)

[See a breakdown of all our groups and 1:1 links.](#)

Highlights of the year included:

- Friendship Day in October 2024
- Pantomimes: [Countdown To Christmas](#) in December 2024
- Our first mothers and daughters [overnight trip](#), to Whitekirk in March 2025
- Our third Charmian Challenge fun run in April 2025.
- [Roxburgh Review](#) and edition 4 of the Interest Link [Newspaper](#) by the Newshounds
- In June 2025 we won Organisation of the Year at the YouthBorders Awards.

A massive vote of thanks goes to all our amazing volunteers and [our funders over the last year](#): our work would not be possible without their fantastic support.

## Survey Outcomes at a Glance

Member Outcomes



Carer Outcomes



# June 2025 Adults Survey

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

Response rates	Members	Family carers	Volunteers			
	64%	63%	61%			
Main Outcomes:						
Impact on Members	More Friends	More opportunities	Greater Happiness	Improved Confidence	Increased Self-esteem	Better Social Skills
Reported by Themselves	100	100%	100%	100%	100%	95%
Reported by Carers	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Reported by Volunteers	98%		100%	98%	98%	98%
Impact on Family Carers	More Opportunities Outside Caring		Eased or More Sustainable Caring Role		Greater Wellbeing	
Reported by Themselves	90%		94%		100%	
Reported by Social Care Professionals	100%		100%		100%	
Impact on Volunteers	Increased Learning Disabilities Awareness		More confidence with people with learning disabilities			
Reported by Themselves	93%		93%			
Other responses:	Members	Family carers	Volunteers	Tutors	Social Care Professionals	
Service still needed	100%	100%			100%	
Feel valued & supported by Interest Link			100%	100%		
Volunteering has met hopes and expectations			100%			
Safe & Professional Service					100%	

## Links:

### Survey Feedback:

[Member Feedback](#)

[Family Carer Feedback](#)

[Volunteer Feedback](#)

[Professional Carer Feedback](#)

[Case Studies 2024-25](#)

[Fundors](#)



**Did you make friends?**

Everybody gets on well which is good and we go for a cuppa afterwards.

I made some good friends and have been hanging out with them outside the groups too.

Lots of friends: Some of us meet when we aren't at the group.

I have made friends with Joss and she is someone who I can trust and feel open about when speaking.

Made quite a lot of close friends and we go for coffees and lunch sometimes too.

I have made lots of new friends at my group.

Made lots of new friends

She's my buddy so yes we're good friends and have been for years.

We are all good friends and work well together.

**Did you try new things?**

Being able to work as a team to create things

Different art stuff

I do singing and baking and drama

I have learned how to do lots of new craft activities etc.

I have made a plant pot, done lots of music and tried new food.

I loved the fashion show and doing baking

I play snooker, go for a tea break, go to the cinema, etc.

new things every week and I like the walks and playing games

The allotment is a good place to be outdoors, growing fresh veg and taking it home.

The Wee Wander Walk is the first time I have ever walked anything like this. I am making better art and displaying it.

**Did it make you feel happy?**

always lots of laughter and fun

Definitely happy and I look forward to my groups.

Happy cause I meet different people

I have great fun. It's good that the groups are all different.

I look forward to my group every time

I love coming to group

I love the happy friendly atmosphere there and look forward to going.

It's a fun group. Have alot of laughs

Makes me feel very welcome when I go.

**Are you more confident or can you do things more easily?**

I try to tackle more as I believe I can do it now.

Being in the groups has boosted my confidence back up

Confident because I'm making friends

I feel more confident within myself.

I feel more creative and it has helped me realise my capabilities.

I now go to the group outings independently.

Joss has given me more confidence and independence: I get the bus or train to Edinburgh.

Now that I'm talking and sharing I feel confident

I get more confidence and like speaking to people
<b>Did it make you feel good about yourself?</b>
Always gives me plenty encouragement.
felt good about coming to group especially when I cook good things to take home
I am more creative because of the group
I feel happy, excited and always look forward to seeing my friends.
I feel I belong to the group
lots of new craft skills - lots of things to show people
Nice to be part of a group.
We have a laugh and get on with everybody.
<b>Did you get better at talking to people?</b>
Boosted my confidence talking
Confidence, opening up taking part in things.
I enjoy talking to people more now
I get more confidence and like speaking to people
I have no inhibitions now that I used to have
I manage to have conversations where as before I would just sit quiet and be embarrassed.
I used to be very shy.
Sometimes I share knowledge about things, especially the plants and growing at the allotment.
Yes that is a definite as I never talked in the group for 5 years and now I say sentences when I act on my own
Yes: there are a lot of people in the group that have the same likes and interest as me

<b>Do you and those you care for still need our service?</b>
100 per cent !! Opportunities to meet friends. Lots of fun really important enjoyable evening/ brunch/ physical activity . Social interaction very very important. We all need it !!
Exactly nothing else for to occupy them.
Gives Maryann time with her peers and opportunities to try new experiences instead of being stuck in the house with no one her own age or friends this is really making a difference already
Interest Link provides our son with fantastic opportunities to meet other people like himself and get involved in a great variety of different things.
It is important for our son to keep contact with his peers and to have social opportunities.
My daughter is not in any other group,no local things in Jedburgh for her age group.she really needs this group.
My son needs this service even more now because other groups that he used to go to have ended due to lack of funding.
No other services cater for my sons needs. He has been with interest link since he was 10 years and has a great relationship with everyone involved
There does not appear to be any other kind of service like this one
This is the only local group my daughter attends
This is the only service she can participate in and is an absolute life line.
<b>Have we given you more opportunities to spend time with the rest of your family, see friends or do other activities?</b>
Able to spend more time the other family members
Especially brunch and fruity fitness as carer able to take daughter!!
Gives me a break, so I can spend time with Mum ( Alzheimer's)
I can go shopping or a long walk
Im able to go away and have time for myself and see friends
It just makes it easier to take my children to activities or help them with their homework while my sister is at the group.
My husband and I can have time on our own to go out for a meal or a walk, which we don't get very often.
We have time in Berwick to relax when our son is at his Lunch Club
This is the only evening activity so gives a chance to go out.
<b>Have we eased your role as a carer, or made it more sustainable?</b>
Feel supported
Gives me a break, and William different company
It is relaxing to know the person you care for is happy and safe.
Just to see her happy.
Knowing Maryann is enjoying herself among friends I can relax while she is there and she always comes home with a big beaming smile which is great
More time to ourselves knowing that our son is enjoying himself in a safe and supported environment.
The break is good for all of us and my son really enjoys his groups.
The group always has good ideas and fun things to do. Happy service user, happy carer!
Time to relax knowing he is in a safe environment
Gives daughter a lot to look forward too. Not totally dependent on myself! Carer relationship enhanced. Gives purpose and something to be proud of when she comes home and shares experiences.
<b>Have we contributed to you or your family's happiness or general wellbeing?</b>



Due to his happiness increasing - we feel happier too.
Gemma always comes home happy after the group meetings therefore we are all happier!
Knowing that our son is happy with all the activities he is involved with and has a great number of very good friends made through Interest Link gives us peace of mind.
Maryann is so much happier now she is back among friends, after COVID there just didn't seem as though there was anywhere for her to go and now she does, she is definitely much happier
My sister is so much happier since starting the group. She was very lonely before and I worried about her.
Nicola enjoys all of the activities that she does with Joss which gives her and us happiness
Seriously would be desperate without Interest Link.
We actively look forward to the sessions and plan our week around them.
Gives me time to breathe and not focus on R even just for an hour
<b>Have we successfully created a safe environment, enabling them to make friends and giving them new opportunities and experiences?</b>
He enjoys his groups and is so excited to attend them.
He loves interest link and there is always new things for him to try
Angela looks for new and different things the group can get involved in which provide benefits to the group. Eg The Woodland Warriors walking club
It's the only chance she gets to meet other younger people
Lovely to hear the laughter and share the enjoyment with daughter after sessions. Do not have any hesitation daughter attending sessions.
My sister really enjoys the newspaper writing group and enjoys catching up with the group on WhatsApp between sessions.
My son finds it helpful to be with others who he can relate to. He gets a chance to learn how to cook, eat healthy food and enjoy walking in the countryside.
Very accessible and welcoming, a chance to be independent and make friends.
<b>Are they happier because of our service?</b>
Actively looks forward to it.
B really looks forward to going to the Friday Club and having Catherine as a one-to-one has been invaluable. Thank you.
Definitely happier
Enjoys the company of the people he has made friends with
He is a lot more relaxed and happy. This is a direct result of what the group and Rosa/Mary put into it.
Looks forward to going out with people he can trust
Can't wait to attend.
He gets out more and does things he enjoys
<b>Do they have more confidence and self-esteem?</b>
Definitely more confidence building friendships.
He can do more and more things with support
He is more confident around money now
New challenges, independence. Very proud to show all achieved.
There are no dangers while attending the groups he feels safe.
They have also become more creative.
Yes, because some activities are challenging so she has a real sense of achievement.
<b>Are their social &amp; communication skills better?</b>

Communicating and laughing.
Enjoys her chats , especially with stefanie and Isabel.
He now independently goes into the group, starts conversations and happily laughs/jokes with his peers. Huge for him.
He still struggles in social situations with new people but in general getting better
He's more ready to talk about his experiences
Nicola tends not to panic as much which improves her communication skills
Lots of Conversation fun and laughter . no hesitation about going to any session Constantly interacting with different people.
Our son is understanding that others in the group need time to speak and for him to listen better.
<b>Is there anything else you want to tell us? For example other differences we have made, highlights of the past year or what we could do to improve our service.</b>
As we live in the countryside mixing with others is not always possible and being part of interest link give him this opportunity
Gemma enjoys her little group sessions, especially the silent disco. As a family we have also enjoyed meeting with service users and their parents/carers at Burns night and Easter night. Thanks to all involved.
In addition to attending activities in Angela's group our son continues to speak weekly with Alex from Mary's group on the phone. The have built a great friendship since the weekly phone calls were introduced during COVID. Alex is just wonderful and our son looks forward to their weekly catch ups.
Interest link has been invaluable to my family. One thing I would maybe like is overnight respite so can do an overnight with my youngest occasionally
Just keep doing what you do. Then we can all cope.
Just more of the same please, it works.
Mary and Rosa run a fantastic service and think carefully about the activities so there is something for everyone.
Philip went away with the group for a few days,it was nice to see him enjoy himself and manage without the comfort of home or myself
The group has made such a huge difference to my sister's happiness and feeling of self-worth. She really enjoys writing and researching for the articles and comes home after sessions full of stories about what they have been doing and pride.
Would be totally lost without Interest Link . All social life outside family. This applies to nearly all that attend. The importance of Interest Link is unmeasurable and can only thank all concerned.
This year central borders organised an overnight stay for mothers and daughters. This was a great experience for us all. It gave us mums a chance to chat and exchange experiences and challenges in a supportive environment.

<b>Have you become more confident socialising with people with learning disabilities</b>
I am more confident talking to people with learning disabilities
I feel confident among people with learning disabilities and can carry that into the community in my everyday life.
I feel more confident interacting and understanding individual needs of the youngsters
In the last year our relationship has become much more easy-going.
I have got very used to being around people with learning disabilities now.
Realised that they are warm, funny and loving.
I am now very comfortable with people with learning disabilities.
<b>Are you more aware of the barriers people with learning disabilities face?</b>
Absolutely; I had no real experience of socialising with people with learning difficulties before joining the group. Though there can be many barriers our service users face, their emotions and personalities shine through.
Got to know what they are capable of
I have a much better understanding of their disabilities and how to help.
It helps me understand them better
Meeting different people with complex needs has made me feel aware also they have taught me to be more patient and laugh more.
Sensory issues sometimes cause barriers like noise and touch.
very, there are still many barriers due to lack of understanding.
Without a doubt a huge learning curve for me as I went in blind.
<b>Have you made friends with the people with learning disabilities you have volunteered with?</b>
Feel I have a good long term friendship with Fiona.
I feel Nicola and I have a great friendship.
Cathy and I are really special friends: we know all about each others families and enjoy each others company.
I have made lots of lovely friends.
I've met a lot of amazing people over the years and made friends for life.
Undoubtably. The groups have been vey welcoming, full of chat and great humour, interested in me and easy to get on with.
Friends for life
I love the equity and companionship the group offers
Yes, enjoy being with them. Have some laughs together and it is great seeing them enjoying themselves
<b>Can you give examples of differences in their happiness, confidence, self-esteem and social skills?</b>
Always happy to talk to me, not as shy, and very patient.
Confidence in taking part such as singing, dancing to music
I have seen Nicola's confidence grow over the time I have been linked with her.
I see them cooking and becoming more independent
Individuals are more confident with building and maintaining relationships
It's amazing seeing them come on and become so much more confident I noticed a lot with our panto from year to year it amazing to see how much they've come on and support eachother.
Mixing with other people and has more confidence
One member I am regularly paired with was very quiet but now often starts conversations, which is lovely.

Seeing the youngsters taking part in pantomime, fashion show and singing, pushing themselves outwith their Confort zone, their self confidence growing as they grow
They are coming out of their shells it is satisfying to see
They often come and speak to me now whether for help or to tell me something funny. When I first started volunteering they wouldn't say much. Means that they feel safe with me now and know I enjoy a laugh.
<b>Do you feel valued and supported by Interest Link and its staff?</b>
Absolutely. Wish I had joined years ago. Activities are so well organised. My opinion is asked for and I feel fully part of a great team.
Always made welcome and feel needed
Angela really looks after us! I know she'd take time and care to support me with any concerns
Definitely. I have been able to bring some of my own skills to Interest Link, which has been valued by the group leaders.
Friendly staff and volunteers Warm environment A valuable place for all involved
I know that if I have any issues that I can contact Mary or Rosa. I meet with Mary on a regular basis.
Staff and fellow volunteers are very supportive and help with any personal difficulties in a confidential way.
Yes at one point I was struggling with the befriending, but a good talk helped very much to put things in perspective and improved the experience
I have had mentorship from Stef and Andrew, they are amazing
Val and Becca are amazing always checking up on me and making sure I'm happy with everything.
<b>Has volunteering with us met your hopes and expectations?</b>
Far exceeded my expectations
I am really enjoying the volunteering and don't feel it is too much. Have met some lovely people.
It has exceeded my expectations and is so rewarding personally
It is really satisfying
More than, as I didn't know what to expect! I'm appreciated. It has opened a new and fun element in my life. Thank You!
So many users have their faces lighting up as they come in - and are recognised and greeted by friends. Very rewarding to be part of offering this social space to some who have very limited socialising opportunities
Yes, it gives me a chance to give something back to help and support the youngsters.
so rewarding
Yes In everyway love it
<b>Do you have any suggestions for improving our service as a whole or your volunteering experience?</b>
I am amazed at the variety of events and activities. I think you really have a wonderful organisation which brings a lot of joy to a lot of people! Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share the joy!!
I can't think of everyone, I feel that everyone has a chance to suggest activities etc for the group
I have suggested bringing music in different ways more into the groups as I believe in particular for disabled people it has huge benefits. We are now doing this with sing along nights, music workshops and karaoke which everyone seems to be enjoying. We even done an impromptu sing along with the guitar at the end of last year singing Christmas Songs .!
I wouldn't change anything Interest Link is a safe environment to volunteer in I highly recommend them
it was perfect but it could go on for longer
More funding to help the members have a wide range of experiences
More publicity o think it's such an amazing project and more people need to be informed about it
no it was perfect
Recruit more volunteers. Let me know if I can help.

<b>Do you feel we offer a safe and professional service and needed opportunities?</b>
All issues are acted on appropriately and timely
Excellent group, lots of variety, fun, safe, different ideas every week.
This is a great service with a lot of commitment from Volunteers.
Val is so thorough, asking for all the safety information
Yes, there are not many groups in the area which provide fun, safe facilities.
Wonderful, varied activities and brilliant experience for all
Definitely, social groups that they are able to engage with their friends and meet new people. Rosa's always looking to find new opportunities for all to experience.
<b>Can you give examples of differences made to members and carers</b>
A member was able to take part in the group and perform on stage, they had not been able to do that before.
Definitely one of the ladies who come to our service was very anxious and not much confidence this group has really brought her out herself has enjoyed meeting new friends .
I can see the transference of skills
I have noticed growth in self esteem from many members and the joy when members attend group activities
Jeremy always looks forward to his visits from Jean and loves to be involved with planned activities.
My client is now so much more confident in herself. She initiates conversations with people which she wouldn't do before. Tries new tasks at home without the hesitation she had before.
She loves coming to see friends, socialise and have fun.
The change & confidence in the person I support is amazing .. they have made lots of good friends ..
Carers are given some much needed time, increase in positive discussions after the session.
Evening groups allow parents to go and do their own thing.
Interest Link provides a much needed lifeline for lots of families.
<b>Do you have any other feedback or suggestions for improvements?</b>
An invaluable group for members, families and carers. Thank you all.
Great service provided by all and great team who manage our local branch. All go above and beyond!
I must praise the group we attended .. everyone one is made to feel so welcome , no rushing , no jargon , lots of laughter & so much Praise ! They person I support has thrived & look forward to going to the group .. they have so much more confidence than they did a year ago .. well done everyone involved !
Interest Link is a fabulous model of support that should be considered widely by all when looking at provisions in the Scottish Borders.
Just continue doing what you do and everyone will benefit from all the effort staff/volunteers put in to the group activities/days out. Well done!
Our member has really enjoyed all groups this year, especially the large organised social events. Rosa has gone over and above to make sure that every person is included.
This is a great service. I feel there is a lot of people who still don't know about Interest link and the work that you do- this could be better advertised.

**Mel** is 53 and lives in Coldstream with her mother. She has a learning disability, limited mobility, deafness and heart condition. The immediate family moved here from South Africa many years ago and her two sisters now also live in the Scottish Borders.

Mel has been a member of Interest Link Borders since 2005 and in that time has had three one-to-one befrienders as well as taking part in our Friday Club in Coldstream which meets monthly. Because of her mobility issues, Mel is completely reliant on her family to take her places which puts a lot of pressure on her mother who is aging and has her own health problems to contend with. Mum finds her caring duties exhausting and relentless and says the only rest and respite she gets is when Mel comes to Interest Link.

During Covid, Mel had to shield for an extended period due to her heart condition and became very isolated, so we organised for her to have a telephone buddy who called her weekly. They developed a lovely friendship and continued to speak to each other fortnightly after Covid. Both Mel and Mum say her buddy has been a huge benefit to Mel and has helped her cope with isolation and given her support when her heart condition flared up and she was very unwell. It's a relief to Mum to know Mel has support outside the family. It also gives them something different to talk about together. Mum is also delighted Mel can come to the Friday Club and give her a break as well as see her friends.

Mel said "They are always laughing and I like to see everyone happy. It's a good social, nice to chat to other people. I enjoyed trying new things"

Mel's Mum said "There are no other local opportunities. Gives me time to do my hobbies like painting. Peace of mind knowing she gets to go out and have a social along with some fun. I'm happy when Mel's happy"

**Bella** is 36 and lives in Coldstream with her parents who both work full-time. Bella has a learning disability, is autistic and can be very anxious (we adapt events to support Bella with her issues with anxiety and panic attacks).

Bella has been a member since she was 18 and takes part in quite a few activities with us. She comes to the Friday Club in Coldstream which runs monthly on a Friday evening and she loves bringing suggestions for things to do at the Club and helping to make plans. She also can be supportive towards others in the group who are less able.

Bella came with us on a residential to Haggerston Castle Holiday Park where she took a full part in all the activities and had a fantastic time.

Bella also attends our Health and Wellbeing Club in Kelso which meets once a month and goes to our New Age Kurling twice a month. She also enjoys coming to our larger events which are Borders-wide e.g. Friendship Day and our annual Charmian Challenge Walk/Run.

After Covid Bella lost confidence travelling independently and has been reliant on her parents to get her from A-B. We're working towards her using the bus with a buddy (another member who is confident



using public transport). She intends to join our Woodland Warriors group when it starts soon in collaboration with Borders Forest Trust. Apart from Interest Link Bella's only activity is a Boccia class. Bella said: "I enjoy all three groups that I go to. I would like to do the residential again, it was fun and gave my mum a break."

Bella's mother and father have often mentioned they value her involvement in Interest Link as she meets friends and has interesting things to do during the week while they work rather than sitting around the house. They feel she has become more independent as a result, and it's helped with her anxiety. Her parents were delighted that she was able to come to our residential again in the summer as they said it gave them much needed space from each other and they appreciated the respite. They often meet with friends when Bella is at her groups. They worry about the future when they won't be around and feel her involvement with Interest Link gives them some peace of mind for the future.

### **Angela**

Angela is 50 and lives independently in Galashiels. Her family live locally and Angela enjoys spending time with them – her mum brings her to and from Fruity Fitness.

Angela has a learning disability and also epilepsy. She is very active and keeps us up to date with her impressive daily step count!

Angela has been a member of Interest Link for over 20 years and has had a 1:1 link to attend college classes during that time as well as now being a member of our new Fruity Fitness sessions. She also attends our Monday night craft sessions. Angela has lots of pals in both groups and enjoys making the crafting projects as gifts for family and friends. Angela shares a taxi to the craft sessions with two of her friends so it really makes for a night out. The sessions are always laughter filled and Angela enjoys lots of 'banter' with everyone – she also really enjoys the social evenings we have at the sessions. The last one was out summer bingo with big prizes and supper. Angela didn't win last time so she is hopeful of a change of luck for Christmas bingo!

Angela was one of the first members to join our new Fruity Fitness group and she always participates fully in the sessions whether it's tennis, football or dancing! She loves to feel the burn.

Angela's mum Irene says "Angela likes to be busy and Interest Link groups give her a chance to see her friends outwith the family – she enjoys coming to fitness and craft and making things for us all"

Angela says "I enjoy being out and I like the fitness group – I like the music too. Next week we are having Spooky Fitness for Halloween and I am wearing my pumpkin earrings and pumpkin ears!"

**Dan The Man** is 26 years old and has been with us since he was 10. Dan lives in a local town with his mum and grown up sister – they are a close family. Dan has a learning disability and is very shy – this makes it tricky for him to get out and about on his own. His mum works hard and has a full time job so she is keen for Dan to be doing activities and enjoying himself rather than being in the house for long periods of time. Dan originally joined our children's group and then transitioned into our youth group. He came with us on our first ever night away with the youth group and told me today that he has very fond memories of laughing until he cried after a menu disaster in the youth hostel we stayed at! Dan also joined in with a 4 link – 2 volunteers and 2 members – within our Roxburgh branch and he particularly enjoyed their outing to an archery school and also their night away staying at an outdoor centre. The link ended after 3 years but many good times were had!

When Dan became “too old” for the youth service he then moved very smoothly into our adult sessions and now attends our fortnightly Brunch Bunch where he loves doing crafts and choosing his lunch in the rescued food café we use as our venue – today’s choice was fish and chips. Dan likes a hearty lunch and a mocha to keep him going through his day!

Dan also attends our fortnightly sessions of drama. He was not keen to be on the stage but was very keen to learn more about the stage so over time he has become our tech assistant for our productions. Dan really enjoys this element and is now confident enough to make suggestions for lighting and stage management!!

As a further example of his increasing confidence, Dan has now joined our branch committee as a member representative. We are very proud of him.

Dan’s mum says “Interest Link has been amazing for Dan over the last 16 years!! I honestly don’t know how I would’ve coped all these years without Interest Link. It gives Dan some time out and about and also gives me a wee break from my caring role”

Dan says “I feel happy in the groups, I am with my friends and there’s always lots of laughs. I really like doing the crafts in the Brunch Bunch too. Interest Link groups are the only ones I go to and they give me more confidence. I feel welcome. I wish I could be in all the groups that they run!”

**Billy** is 34 and is autistic. He lives with his mum in Hawick and joined the Roxburgh Branch last September. Billy attends the local Day Centre but struggles to connect with friends that are of the same age and similar ability. Billy finds it difficult in larger groups because it is noisy and overwhelming for him.

I approached Billy’s mum Paula asking if Billy would like to become a member of our Life Skills Group. Paula thought that this would be a great opportunity for him, as it has been a long time since Billy has been at school and has no current outlet to practice money handling, improve numeracy skills and enhance his social skills. Paula especially liked the fact that the Life Skills group is small.

Billy started the Life Skills Group in January of this year and has grown in confidence. Initially he found it hard to concentrate and required time to get to know everybody, settle into the group and concentrate on the challenges that Liz our Tutor prepares for the group members. Because the group is small Billy has become less anxious and the quiet atmosphere has helped him concentrate on tasks. Paula, Billy’s mum has been really pleased with his progress so far and says Billy talks about the group and really looks forward to seeing new friends. Billy is friendly with all the group members, and one of his roles is to ask group members what they would like to drink at breaktime.

Billy really enjoyed the Trolley Dash at Morrisons in Hawick, where all the group members were given a shopping challenge and work as a team. Billy has improved his skills in numeracy, counting and problem solving. Billy’s confidence has increased, and he has new friends that he enjoys spending time with. Paula is very happy that he can attend a group that provides opportunities for him to improve skills in many areas, and that they are meaningful to everyday life.

“He loves coming and is always happy when he knows it’s on, which makes me happy. I have time with my mum and it lifts a weight on me knowing that Billy is doing things he enjoys with friends. ”

**Sally** is 40, has a learning disability and is cared for by her elderly parents and her sister Ruth. She has felt isolated and has very few opportunities to socialize and meet up with people of the same age. She is now a member of our Adult Caledonian Group and our Newshounds Group in Hawick fortnightly.

Sally looks forward to the Newshounds Group and has already made new friends. Sally always had a desire to attend a Media Course as she loves writing stories and being creative. The Newshound Group has offered a unique opportunity for her to express herself creatively and learn to report, interview and write news articles with support.

Sally is more confident and very pleased about what she has achieved so far. Sally also has an opportunity to spend time with new friends who have the same passion. Ruth is very happy with her sister's progress and is so glad she has had this opportunity to enhance her social skills and be part of a group she enjoys. The Caledonian Group also provides another opportunity to be part of a group that involves friendship and activities that she hasn't been able to access.

Sally's confidence has soared and was recently very pleased with herself when she interviewed a famous local jockey and wrote an article on his recent successes, all the more so because she loves horses.

"Sally really enjoys the group and the work the Hounds put together is so professional" said Ruth, Sally's sister. Sally's elderly parents are very happy that she has found new friends.

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