



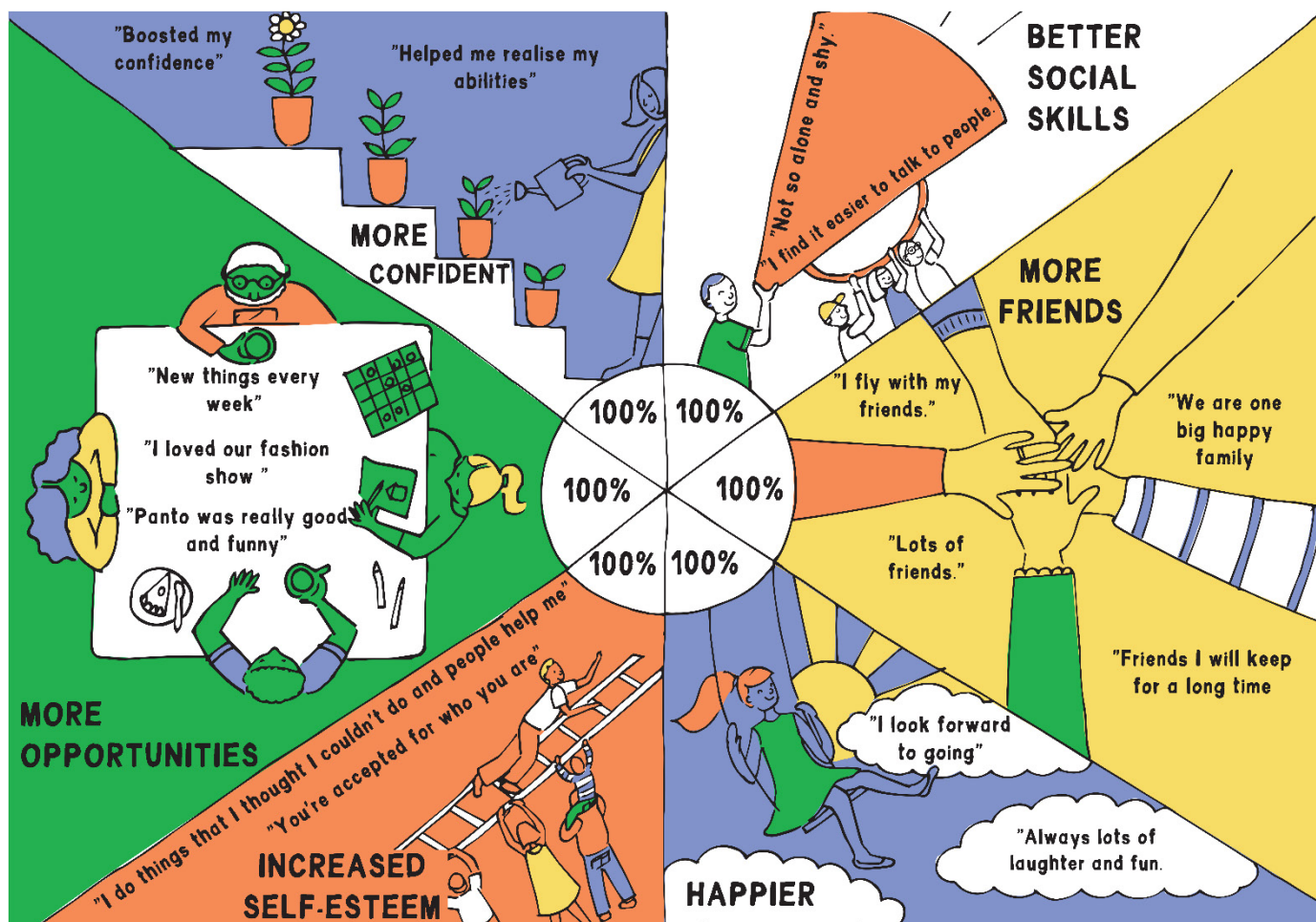
2025

Impact Report

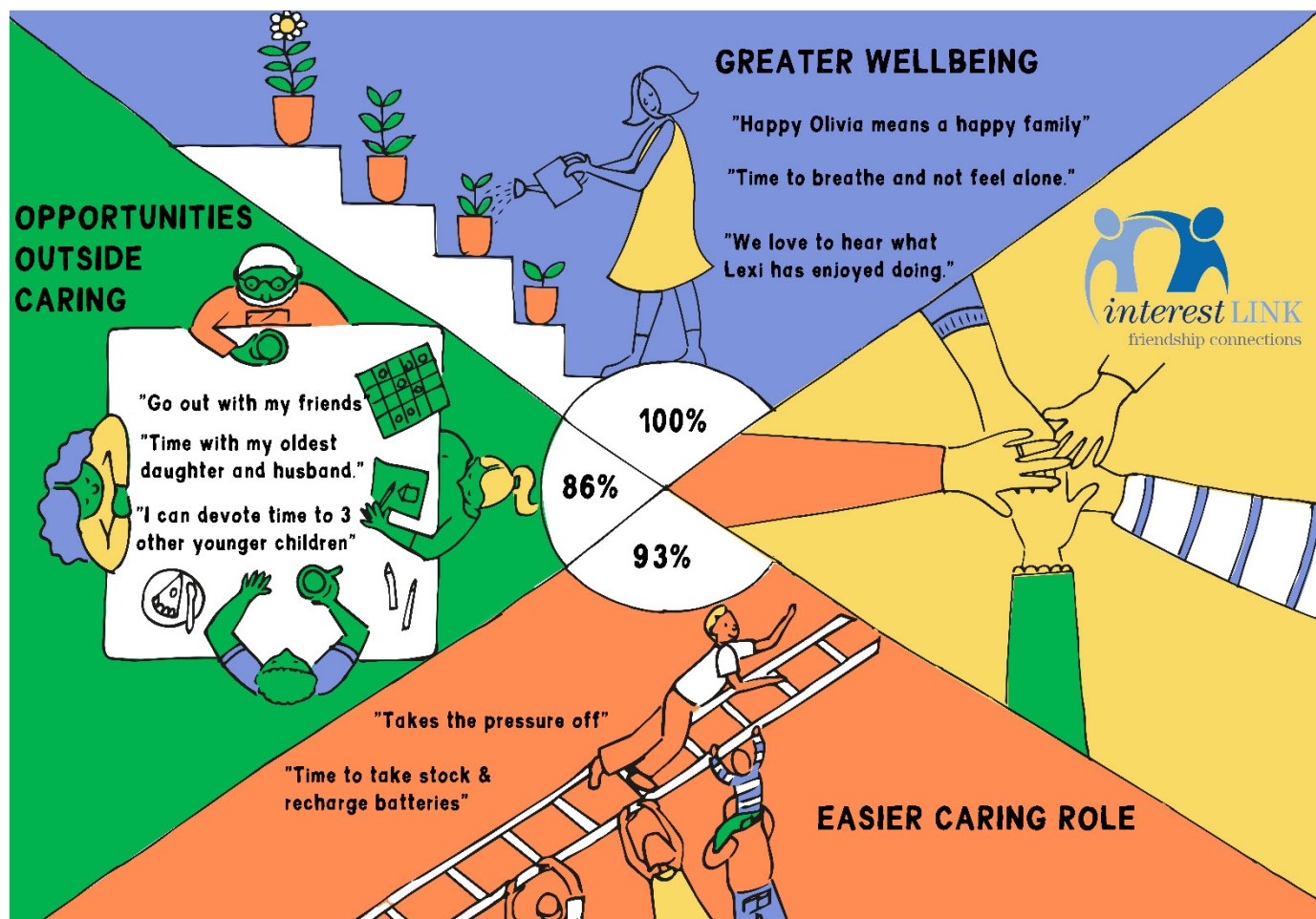
Tweeddale Branch

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
love to chat now
boosted my confidence

Members with learning disabilities said:



Family carers said:



Interest Link's Aims and Activities across the Scottish Borders

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.

Tweeddale Activities 2024-25

At 1st August 2025 the branch was supporting 52 members with learning disabilities aged 11-75 (as last year). There are 63 places in 6 befriending groups (up from 57 places last year). 1:1 links have reduced slightly from 18 to 15, continuing the shift of focus towards groups. 60 family carers enjoyed short break respite.

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

Branch Co-ordinators Mary Mouat and Rosa Cabello deliver the service, along with sessional workers, tutors and 40 volunteers. Mary and Rosa also run regular social events in Peebles to enable everyone to come together, particularly members not currently in a group or 1:1 link. There is also a monthly parents craft & chat group to provide additional support to family carers.

Two new groups will be piloted from Autumn 2025:

A cooking group in partnership with Food Foundation: 16 members (8 new to our service) will rotate in small groups of 4, each having two four-session blocks.

A Keep-fit group with 12 members (4 new)

Highlights of the year included:

- Friendship Day in October 2024
- Our third Charmian Challenge fun run in April 2025.
- 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 Tweeddale Survey

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

| Response rates | Members | Family carers | Volunteers | Tutors | | |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| | 40% | 56% | 53% | 100% | | |
| 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% | 100% |
| Reported by Carers | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Reported by Volunteers | 100% | | 100% | 94% | 94% | 94% |
| | | | | | | |
| Impact on Family Carers | More Opportunities Outside Caring | | Eased or More Sustainable Caring Role | | Greater Wellbeing | |
| Reported by Themselves | 86% | | 93% | | 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 | 100% | | 100% | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| 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](#)

[Tutor Feedback](#)

[Case Studies 2024-25](#)

[Funders](#)

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| Did you make friends? |
| I have made friends with Joss and she is someone who I can trust and feel open about when speaking. |
| I have made lots of new friends at my group. |
| I have met lots of new friends. |
| I make lots of friends in the group |
| New and old friends. |
| Yes lots of friends |
| |
| Did you try new things? |
| Charity shopping |
| Gardening |
| I do singing and baking and drama |
| I play snooker, go for a tea break, go to the cinema, etc. |
| I really like archery, games nights, drumming and curling. |
| Sometimes I worry about doing new things but it's always ok in the groups. |
| The Wee Wander Walk - This is the first time I have ever walked anything like this. |
| |
| Did it make you feel happy? |
| I always look forward to group nights. |
| I like the helpers and the other members. |
| I love the happy friendly atmosphere there and look forward to going. |
| It's nice to see my friends when I go to the group. |
| Makes me feel very welcome when I go. |
| very happy |
| Yes it makes me very happy as I catch up with my friends and do fun things. |
| |
| Are you more confident or can you do things more easily? |
| Absolutely. |
| Getting there. |
| I manage to have conversations with people where as before I would just sit quiet and be embarrassed. |
| I now go into the group and group outings independently. |
| Joss has given me a bit for confidence. I'm now able to get the bus to Edinburgh and then catch the train somewhere by myself . |
| Yes I am quite new to the groups and I really like coming and get involved. |
| Yes, because I feel safe and the people and helpers are nice. |
| |
| Did it make you feel good about yourself? |
| Definitely. |
| I feel happy, excited and always look forward to seeing my friends. |
| I felt more confident to try a new group and now to go Zumba every week and this was due to the Interest Link group. |
| Just having to confidence to more things makes it feels easier . |
| Nice to be part of a group. |
| |
| Did you get better at talking to people? |

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| Don't mind talking to people now |
| I can now start a conversation off with someone out with the group where I couldn't do this before. |
| I speak and feel comfortable in front of all the group and make jokes. |
| I used to be very shy. |
| Yes, I love to meet lots of people. |
| Don't mind talking to people now |
| I can now start a conversation off with someone out with the group where I couldn't do this before. |
| |
| Is there anything else you want to say? |
| I feel happy attending the groups, they are so friendly. I like to tell everyone what I have been up to, and I like to come home and do crafts and ideas I have learnt at the groups! |
| I get excited every week when all the different groups are on, it gives me something fun to attend and keep me very busy. I like to see what we will be up to week to week! |
| Jean is a fantastic befriender. |
| Thank you for being my Interest Link |
| Thank you to Interest Link for giving me this opportunity which has made me grown in confidence. |
| I try to tackle more as I believe I can do it now. |

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| Do you and those you care for still need our service? |
| Daniel doesn't have friends and doesn't really know how to socialise so this is a great place for him to meet and socialise with young people his or similar age. |
| It is important for our son to keep contact with his peers and to have social opportunities. |
| K tried other local youth opportunities but only interest Link had the structure and ethos that suited him. |
| There does not appear to be any other kind of service like this one |
| This is the only service she can participate in and is an absolute life line. |
| This is invaluable for him because without this group his social and self esteem would diminish as there isn't any other groups like this in the area. |
| Have we given you more opportunities to spend time with the rest of your family, see friends or do other activities? |
| I can go and do things for myself and not need to worry about things. |
| It takes stress off me as I get stressed when I don't have enough time to finish the work I need to do (M.D. of a company as well as having health issues and a SEN child). |
| Provides respite for us and he counts down the days. |
| This is the only evening activity so gives a chance to go out. |
| We joined a Laugh and Craft carers group, also with Interest Link that gave us the opportunity to meet other parents for crafting and sharing experiences. |
| Have we eased your role as a carer, or made it more sustainable? |
| It is relaxing to know the person you care for is happy and safe. |
| Just to see her happy. |
| K is much happier and more confident and will more readily share his thoughts and experiences with us. |
| The break is good for all of us and my son really enjoys his groups. |
| He loves going to the group on a Monday night and that in itself gives me a break to do other things that take a bit of stress off me. |
| Over the many years that Nicola has spent with Joss she has gained in confidence at trying new things which has made life easier when Nicola has to try other new things within the family. |
| Have we contributed to you or your family's happiness or general wellbeing? |
| Due to his happiness increasing - we feel happier too. |
| He comes back happy after group and having the catch-up time for work on a Monday is definitely beneficial for me. |
| Just having a little time for ourselves |
| Ks confidence and wellbeing filters down to the rest of our family. |
| Nicola enjoys all of the activities that she does with Joss which gives her and us happiness |
| Some time separated from each other doing our own things then we are able to tell each other about our day. |
| We are all happy. |
| Lewis enjoys the group and feels part of it. |
| We really enjoy going to the Parents groups. |
| Have we successfully created a safe environment, enabling them to make friends and giving them new opportunities and experiences? |
| Absolutely, he does not have a group the same as this and that does as much for his mental and physical wellbeing as this group. |

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| Definitely |
| He enjoys his groups and is so excited to attend them. |
| He loves the different activities and looks forward to them. |
| This is exactly what Interest Link does in trips, gardening groups, art groups. |
| Very accessible and welcoming, a chance to be independent and make friends. |
| Yes because they are safe around other users and staff. |
| |
| Are they happier because of our service? |
| Can't wait to attend. |
| Definitely. |
| He is a lot more relaxed and happy. This is a direct result of what the group and Rosa/Mary put into it. |
| He really enjoys his groups, also he loves to see his friends. |
| Nicola with the support of Joss has tried many new things that in the past she would have found very challenging and this has given her greater confidence and it brings her a contentment. |
| Very much so. |
| |
| Do they have more confidence and self-esteem? |
| Definitely more confidence building friendships. |
| I think so. He needs more time with peers as friendship is important and he's lacking in that just now. |
| There is no dangers while attending the groups he feels safe. |
| Yes, because some activities are challenging so she has a real sense of achievement. |
| |
| Are their social & communication skills better? |
| Communicating and laughing. |
| Definitely. He has more social speech now. |
| He now independently goes into the group, starts conversations and happily laughs/jokes with his peers. Huge for him. |
| Nicola tends not to panic as much which improves her communication skills |
| |
| 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. |
| At present we cannot think of any way that the Tweeddale group can be improved. (You cannot improve on perfection). |
| Can't think of anything to improve as it's great as it is. I will always be grateful for Mary's patience and persistence with Daniel as he didn't want to come at first but she encouraged him and took it slow and after his first night he got annoyed as it was every 2 weeks, not every week! lol |
| Many thanks as always to Joss who has been a great support to Nicola and to Mary for the work that she does. |
| Mary and Rosa run a fantastic service and think carefully about the activities so there is something for everyone. |
| My daughter's involvement, activities are a great help to her life and confidence. |
| she really enjoyed the cooking which she did with Rosa. think it gave her a sense of achievement. she was so proud of herself. |
| The Tweeddale Group goes above and beyond and has formed a real community. It is always lovely to see the groups coming together at wider events. |

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| Since you started volunteering, have you become more confident socialising with people with learning disabilities |
| I feel confident among people with learning disabilities and can carry that into the community in my everyday life. |
| I have got very used to being around people with learning disabilities now. |
| In the last year our relationship has become much more easy-going. |
| That's an excellent question and my answer is a resounding YES |
| I am now very comfortable with people with learning disabilities. |
| |
| Are you more aware of the barriers they face? |
| Absolutely. I work with a wide range of people, and having a working knowledge of challenges that people have with a learning disability and also their care givers is invaluable. |
| I had no real experience of socialising with people with learning disabilities before joining the group. Though there can be many barriers our service users face, they are still very human, with emotions and personalities that shine through. |
| Learning new skill to helping everyone in all areas |
| I really appreciate their difficulties, and how they overcome them! |
| Without a doubt a huge learning curve for me as I went in blind. |
| |
| Have you made friends with the people with learning disabilities you have volunteered with? |
| Cathy and I are really special friends: we know all about each others families and enjoy each others company. |
| Feel I have a good long term friendship with Fiona. |
| I feel Nicola and I have a great friendship. |
| I have made amazing connections. |
| Undoubtably. The groups have been vey welcoming, full of chat and great humour, interested in me and easy to get on with. |
| I feel I have made many friends during my time with Interest Link and value the time spent with them. |
| I have a conversation with any members that I see in public or in school. |
| |
| Can you give examples of differences in their happiness, confidence, self-esteem and social skills? |
| Always happy to talk to me, not as shy as she was, and very patient. |
| Have become a lot more open to conversations about interests or hobbies that when I first met them. |
| I have seen Nicola's confidence grow over the time I have been linked with her. |
| One member I am regularly paired with was very quiet but now often starts conversations, which is lovely. |
| Shy at the start of the year but is now very confident |
| At the beginning of our friendship, Fiona could be quite rigid with our time together (I realise that this gave her security). As time has evolved she is happy to be more flexible. |
| Member is always happy to go out on trips with me, and very friendly when out, even with strangers. |
| |
| Do you feel valued and supported by Interest Link and its staff? |
| 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. |
| Definitely. I have been able to bring some of my own skills to Interest Link, which has been valued by the group leaders. |
| I know that if I have any issues that I can contact Mary or Rosa. I meet with Mary on a regular basis for a catch up about my link. |

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| Mary always make sure we all welcome and have a great time each week |
| The staff and fellow volunteers are very supportive and are there to 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 feel supported and appreciated by both Rosa and Mary. |
| I know I can get in touch with Mary at any time if there is a problem. We meet up for a coffee to discuss how things are on a regular basis. |
| Mary and I enjoy our coffees and long chats. |
| Very much so, always feel included and appreciated. |
| |
| Has volunteering with us met your hopes and expectations? |
| More than, as I didn't know what to expect! |
| Allowed me to get involved in a small way to fulfil my wishes and help others |
| Always |
| Volunteering has widened my appreciation of what people can do with the correct support and encouragement and I really enjoy my time with Interest Link. |
| I'm appreciated. It has opened a new and fun element in my life. Thank You! |
| It is one of the best things that I have ever been involved in. I have a new group of friends. I feel so appreciated. I love their humour! |
| |
| Do you have any other reflections about your volunteering experience or suggestions for us? |
| Cathy my Link knows many people in Peebles who are always friendly but don't commit to meeting her socially. I think the most magical outings for Cathy are our visits to the Eastgate theatre for the Tribute concerts. We always get seats in the front row so she is able to dance. Many members of the audience congratulate her afterwards! |
| Volunteering with Interest link has helped to boost my own confidence. |
| Enjoy helping others and look forward to meeting up |
| I have always wanted to make a difference to people in life that need extra support. Volunteering has allowed me to do that and gain experience in order to help and make a difference to other peoples lives. |
| I was inspired both by my daughter, who volunteered with Interest Link last year, I had a very strong need to connect with people in the community after moving from abroad. I feel much happier and more fulfilled than I was before joining and I really feel connected to a valuable part of our community. Seeing the members every week puts a huge smile on my face, and I genuinely look forward to seeing everyone and catching up on their news. I feel a part of the group and get so much energy from each session. I think if we want to make the world a better place then we need to start in our own hearts and communities |
| I enjoy seeing people open up around me which I believe interest link is a perfect conduit for. It is enjoyable to learn more about people that I may have otherwise not known very well or at all. |
| I enjoy seeing the pleasures the users get from the group. The laughter and interaction is so special and I feel I benefit as much as them. |

Selected Feedback: Care & Social Work Professionals

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| Excellent group, lots of variety, fun, safe, different ideas every week. |
| The location and room we use are ideal. The group is well run with friendly enthusiastic staff. Everything runs tick tok. |
| Definitely needed, 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. |
| It is not just a group there are various organised trips and events that the group have a say in and look forward to. This group would be sadly missed if it was not there as there is no others like it out there. |
| A member was able to take part in the group and perform on stage, they had not been able to do that before joining |
| I have noticed a grow in self esteem from many members and the joy experienced when members attend group 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. |
| The individual feels good about himself. |
| Evening groups allow parents to go and do their own thing. |
| Interest Link provides a much needed lifeline for lots of families. |
| Lots of exciting activities and day trips. |
| Great service provided by all and great team. All go above and beyond! |
| J 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. |

Selected Feedback: Tutors

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| It is wonderful to see people getting their hands in the soil, learning new skills, socialising or simply enjoying the sensorial nature of the garden. A stand out memory from the past year was everyone making herbal balm and salves from scratch to take home. It was a great achievement and hopefully a special experience for the group. |
| Working with the children and adult groups is immensely rewarding work for a practitioner. I have got to know group members and watched as their social skills and life skills have improved and they have grown to become confident young people, able to enjoy being out and about with others. The Parents group has been very rewarding, as the group of parents have been able to get to know each other, whilst being creative, share stories and help each other with the practicalities of bringing up a child with learning disabilities. This group have become good friends and look forward to each time they meet. |
| The members love being creative and often take extra materials away so they can do more of the same at home. The creative activities are great for building confidence and friendships within the groups, as they go through the process of initially being nervous, relaxing into making something, and being proud of what they have achieved at the end. |
| Rosa is always forthcoming in her appreciation for our sessions and work. |
| Mary & Rosa are always supportive. They are friendly, welcoming and happy to talk if I have any concerns. I also feel that they value my work as a creative practitioner. They are both completely dedicated to their work and it really shows in the amount of care and attention they put into the sessions, which are always so sociable and fun. |
| Interest Link provide a fantastic service to the members and their support. It's clear that the effects of their work are broad and have a huge impact on the wellbeing of those who attend groups. It is the kind of service that needs supporting and protecting at all costs. Rosa is exceptionally organised, dedicated and goes to great lengths to ensure everyone is included and valued. It is a pleasure to work with Interest Link. |

Niamh is a young woman with down's syndrome. She is 23 years old and is a member of our Front Runners (Youth) Group. Up to the age of 16, she attended the Champions (Children's) Group. She is also linked 1:1 with an adult volunteer.

Niamh has always embraced the Group activities whole-heartedly and enjoys being creative in particular. She is always keen to take on new opportunities and last year took part in a cooking workshop at the Food Foundation.

Niamh can be forthright, and she can occasionally be quite bossy. Niamh always has 'news' to tell the Group at break times and enjoys the spotlight. She has a positive influence on other people and enjoys helping other people to do activities. She loves feeling a special part of Front Runners.

Niamh is helpful and likes to tidy up after breaktime. She travels home from the Group in the Tweed Wheels minibus with other peer mentors and service user(s). She enjoys the fun in the minibus and chats and sings with everyone and enjoys playing games and sharing jokes.

Being involved with Interest Link over the years has been hugely important to Niamh, helping her to make friends with other people with learning disabilities and peer mentor volunteers who accept her just as she is.

She has a wide circle of friends now, both within the Front Runners Group and in the wider Interest Link community in Tweeddale. Niamh's mum says: "She enjoys it so, so much. All the activities. She really looks forward to it; she absolutely adores it. It gives her something to look forward to. It just gives us time when we're not worrying about her 'Is she ok? Is she safe?' We can choose what we want to do. It's time for us. We really enjoy that she gets a lift back. Niamh says: 'I'm going to see my friends.' I haven't the words to say how much she enjoys it."

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With thanks to all our Tweeddale Funders in 2024-25



David Solomons
Charitable Trust



Peebles Common
Good Fund

Peebles Round
Table

