



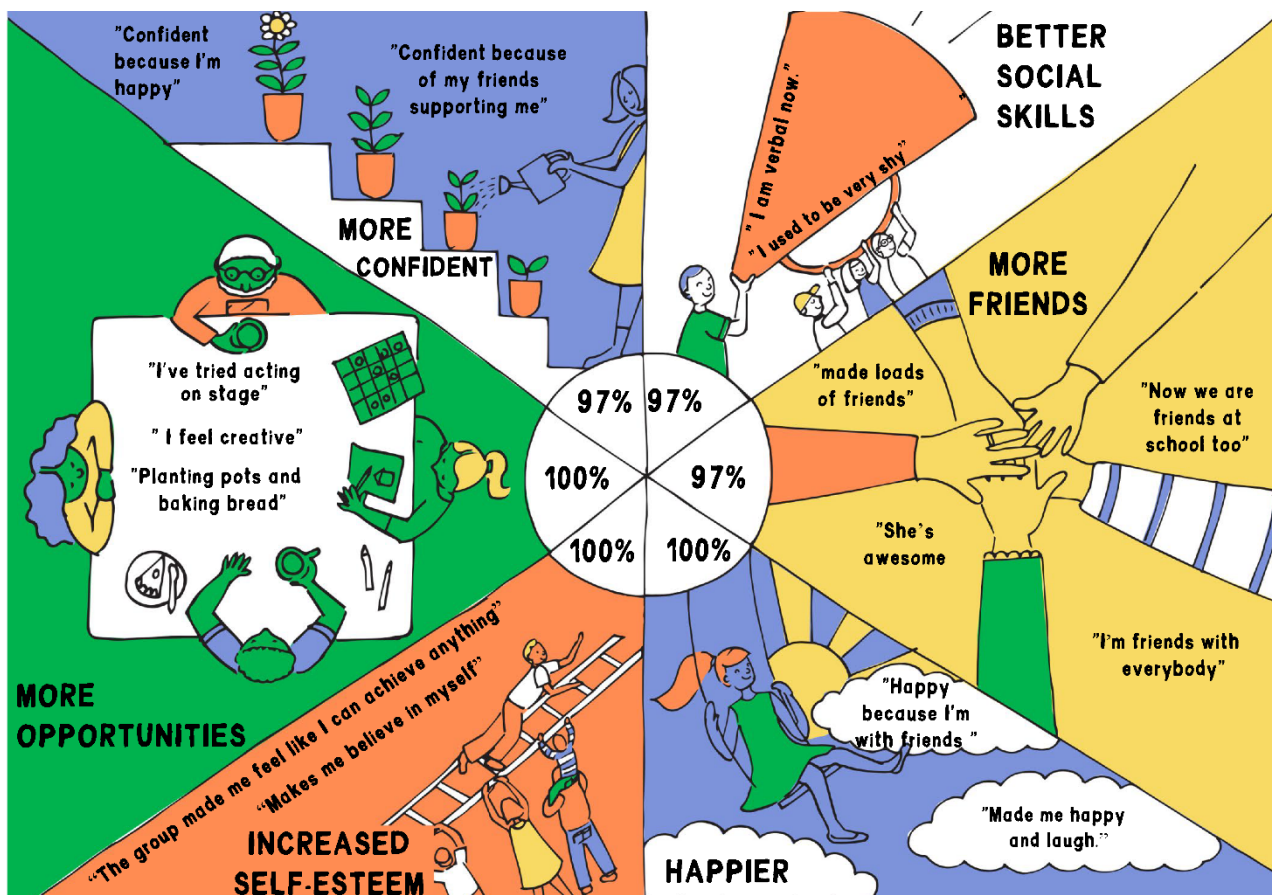
2026

Impact Report

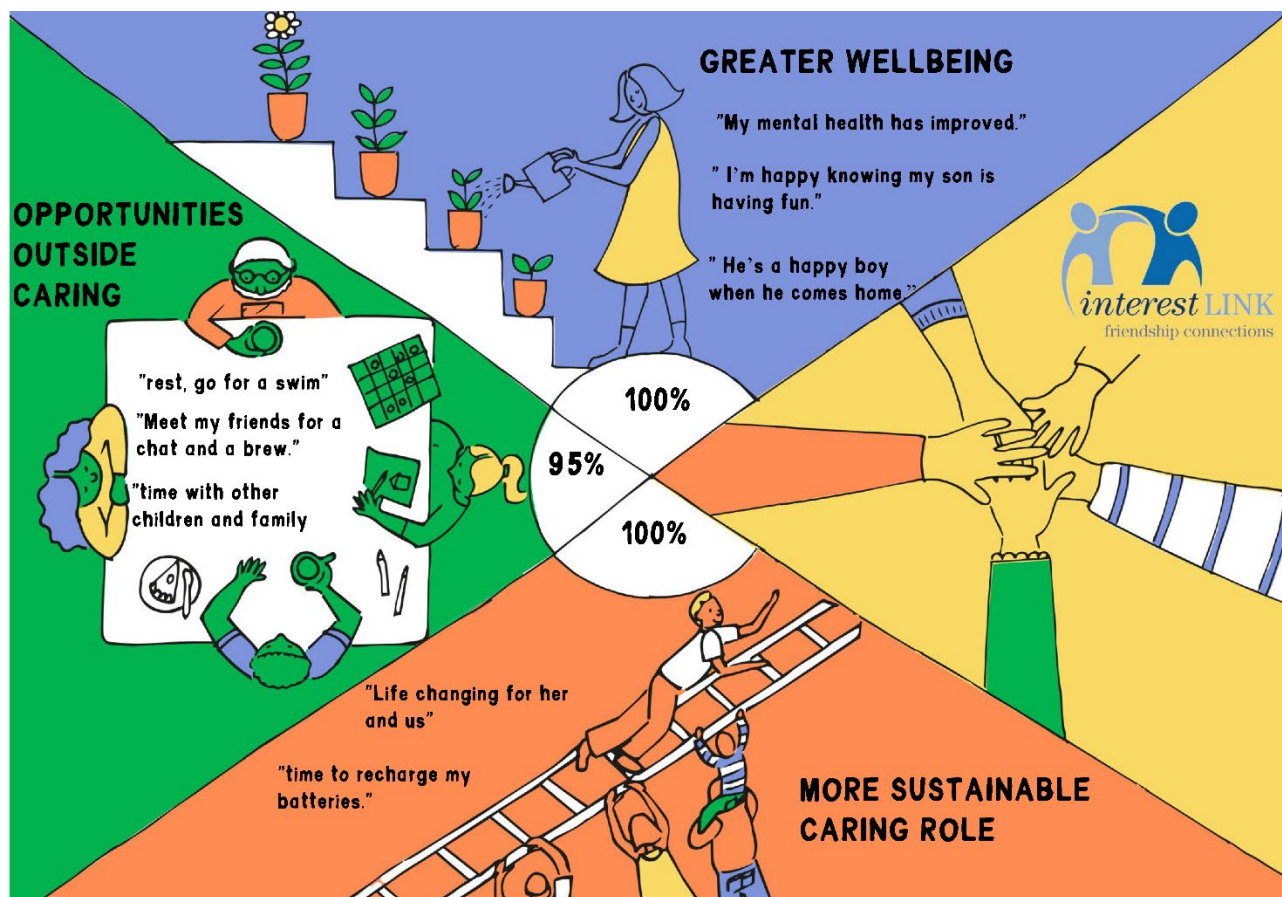
Tweeddale Branch

ALWAYS LOOK FORWARD TO IT
BECOMING MORE INDEPENDENT
ALWAYS FEEL WELCOME
PROUD OF WHAT I ACHIEVE
A LOT MORE CONFIDENT
MAKES ME FEEL HAPPY
MADE LOTS OF NEW FRIENDS
FUN AND LAUGHTER
TRYING LOTS OF NEW THINGS
BETTER AT TALKING TO PEOPLE
I FEEL SAFE AND SUPPORTED

Members with learning disabilities said:



Family carers said:



Our Mission & Impact

We aim to improve the quality of life of socially isolated children (aged 8+), young people and adults with learning disabilities throughout the Scottish Borders. Cerebral Palsy, Downs Syndrome or autism are usually involved, with high accompanying levels of epilepsy, sensory impairments and mental health problems.

Members are often segregated at school and afterwards and lack opportunities for friendships and enriching activities crucial to wellbeing and personal development. Only 1% are likely to have a partner and 5% a job, day centre and college provision have shrunk by 80% and members are vulnerable in the community on their own. There are no other services addressing this locally.

Our volunteer befriending service has developed since 1990 through co-production with members & families, with new groups and ideas usually generated and initiated at branch-level.

We 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 service is open to anyone with learning disabilities through referral or self-referral. It is free of charge, save for occasional activity contributions (c£4) which are never a barrier to accessing the service. Transport is provided where needed.

We aim for longterm support, with many 1:1 links lasting 5 years or more and no limit to length of group membership save age boundaries for children and young people's groups. Volunteers are recruited from schools and the community and are PVG checked, trained (including safeguarding) and supported by staff. They provide support where needed, but the emphasis is on fun and friendship. We also draw on paid supporters, particularly to help those with higher needs.

Our service overcomes social barriers and provides fun and accessible opportunities, experiences and friendship networks on a longterm basis. Members form rich, trusting and often longterm friendships with volunteers and each other and have opportunities for new activities and experiences. This reduces social isolation and builds happiness, confidence, self-esteem and social skills. Volunteers are often the only people in members' lives out of choice and just for fun, and this has a massive impact. Involving young volunteers enables the peer-age friendship networks that children and young people value so highly.

Family carers have regular respite to spend on favourite activities, other family members and friends, happy the person they care for is having fun in a safe environment. Members return home fresh and with something to look forward to, improving family dynamics and sustainability.

Tweeddale Activities 2025-26

At 1st August 2026 the branch is supporting 62 members with learning disabilities aged 11-76 (up from 52 last year).

- There are 102 places in 11 befriending groups (up from 63 places in 6 groups last year).
- 1:1 links have reduced from 15 to 14.
- 32 members are in more than one group (or have a group place and one-to-one link)
- 60 family carers enjoyed short break respite.

[See a breakdown of Tweeddale groups.](#)

Branch Co-ordinators Mary Mouat and Rosa Cabello deliver the service, along with tutors and 40 volunteers. There is also a monthly parents craft & chat group to provide additional support to family carers.

New groups started during the year:

- Cookery and catering skills for adults in Peebles in partnership with The Food Foundation, using a novel arrangement of four groups of four members rotating through 3-session courses on a continuing basis. This has enabled each member to have their own cooking station and produce their own meal.
- Keep-fit with Carmen's Fitness in Peebles adopted a model first used in Central Borders.
- Café Catch Up in Peebles: an informal unstructured group for older members of our youth groups, meeting fortnightly for general banter and chats about moving into adult life.
- The popular Tweeddale intergenerational social events became a regular monthly event.

Highlights of the year included:

- The Wee Wander Challenge in September 2025: 'The Crafty Gardeners', our Kiltwalk Team of 8 members and 10 carers completed the Wee Wander Challenge in Edinburgh, raising £1,250 for branch funds.
- Friendship Day in October 2025.
- Charmian Challenge fun run in April 2026.

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.



June 2026 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		
	63%	73%	60%	100%		
Main Outcomes:						
Impact on Members	More Friends	More opportunities	Greater Happiness	Improved Confidence	Increased Self-esteem	Better Social Skills
Reported by Themselves	97%	100%	100%	97%	100%	97%
Reported by Carers	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	96%
Reported by Volunteers	95%		100%	100%	100%	100%
Impact on Family Carers	More Opportunities Outside Caring		Eased or More Sustainable Caring Role		Greater Wellbeing	
Reported by Themselves	95%		100%		100%	
Reported by 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 2025-26](#)

[Fundors](#)

Did you make friends?

I have made friends with Robbie and I talk about trains with him, and now we are friends at school too.
 I really like Barbara because she is my buddy - since I was young, 10 years old.
 I have made loads of friends, and see them in school.
 It's good to meet new friends at the group. I have lots of friends at the group.
 Really built up a trust and friendship with Joss.
 I have made lots of new friends including Lewis, Greg and Kyle.
 I am still happy to go out with Ewan.
 I enjoy meeting my friends at the group.

Did you try new things?

Got the bus to Edinburgh by myself to meet Joss, and did many new walks around Innerleithen.
 I have tried new things and I am going to try a big thing - staying away from home at Netherurd.
 We visited the Alpacas and did the Alpaca Walk.
 Rosa plans lots of different fun things to do.
 I go places I would be worried about going, like Bowhill. I try things I would worry about, like the Kiltwalk.
 The first time I have tried gardening, and I have learnt new skills with the art.
 I have made truffles, played new board games, talked to new people and gone bowling.
 Archery, curling and crafts.

Did it make you feel happy?

I am very happy attending Rosa's groups. They are fun and I feel safe.
 Because I do fun things with my friends. The leaders Mary, Steph and Amy are all very lovely.
 The group is my safe space, and without it I would just be in my house.
 Yeah, the group makes me happy - it lets me out of the house on Monday nights and lets me meet new people.
 I love being with Barbara because she is a really nice woman. Sometimes she takes me to the cinema.
 Surrounded by friends, lots of activities and stimulation.
 Pat is special company. She's nice, a special friend.
 I enjoy the singalongs and games nights and meeting my friends.

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

Since I first joined I am a lot more confident. I am now managing to be more independent, doing my own shopping and housework. I also give more eye contact (I have autism).
 I can now confidently walk into my group on my own and stay by myself, with my carers bringing me and collecting me.
 I go without my mum.
 Barbara has helped me with traffic and crossing the road.
 I used to not talk to people much, but now I talk a lot and have made many friends in the group.
 I have never been the most confident person, but I'm now confident enough to try new things.
 I feel confident going on the bus with Pat.
 I feel I can share my views and news.

Did it make you feel good about yourself?

My self-esteem has grown.

I'm proud when I made the plant pots.
Being with Barbara makes me feel good because she is so supportive.
I love being able to chat about things I am interested in, and there's always one of my friends there to talk to.
Enjoy activities with friends. Supports my independence.
People talking to me, noticing me and giving compliments.
Makes me believe in myself a little better.
Everything to do with Pat makes me feel good about myself. She's a nice person.
Did you get better at talking to people?
I am now better at talking to people here and in school. I'm also better at talking to adults.
I can talk to people in the general public and my Zumba class, which I had difficulty doing before. I find it easier now I've got to know them well.
There are a lot of people at the group with shared interests, so it makes me more social.
I feel more confident asking at shops and at home for things I need or want.
I chat a lot more.
It's easier to share.
I just confide in Pat. I can make friends easily with anybody.
Yes, I am better at talking to people because I feel safe.
Is there anything else you want to say?
Rosa goes over and above to ensure I have the best time. This year I particularly enjoyed our visit to Bowhill House. The Disco night was brilliant fun. I'm really looking forward to Netherurd and the Kiltwalk. At Interest Link I live my best life!
I love attending all the groups Rosa plans - they are fun and exciting.
Thank you Joss and Mary for giving me this opportunity.
I would be very sad if I didn't have this club. It's a lovely creative group.
I really enjoy the chat, advice other members pass on, and the different activities we do.
I feel more creative because of the group.
I am not afraid to tackle art projects now.

Do you and those you care for still need our service?

This is absolutely vital for Calum, as where he lives there isn't really anything else for autistic adults to do. The group is hugely beneficial for his emotional health as he gets to spend time with his peer group. Lewis really enjoys the group and the Zoom groups. There aren't many groups like Interest Link with such regular, consistent commitment to young adults.

It's the only activity our son can attend independently without us. He really enjoys it and it makes him feel included as part of a group. His brother does lots of activities he can't do, so it's really nice for him to have something suitable.

Joss has proved a great support to Nicola. They meet twice a month, sometimes just for a walk, and Nicola sees Joss as a valuable friend.

Our son values the group and the friends he sees there. He would be unlikely to have contact with them otherwise.

There are not many places for my sisters to go, but these groups let them come along, meet new people and, most importantly, feel safe.

No other local opportunities. My son loves it and looks forward to it each time.

Without this service my son would be left at home with nothing to do and no interaction with anyone except me.

Have we given you more opportunities to spend time with the rest of your family, see friends or do other activities?

Shopping, reading, having a moment to myself. It's wonderful because we know Rosa and Mary take such good care of Calum in a safe and secure place.

My husband and I manage to go for tea and have time together, which we don't usually get to do.

Yes, while my son is at the group I meet a friend and we go for a walk.

It allows me to rest, go for a swim or do work that needs doing.

This year we have become grandparents and have been able to help with childcare.

Definitely - it gives me peace of mind knowing she is somewhere safe, and takes the worry away.

Mostly time as a couple, and my son loves the time away.

Without these groups he would not be able to see the friends he has or make new ones.

Have we eased your role as a carer, or made it more sustainable?

Definitely - to see our young adult become independent, having friends and a social life of their own, is wonderful.

The group has greatly improved K's confidence and social skills, which has eased our role as it helps us help him.

My working hours land on the group days, which is fantastic. The girls really love coming along - it really helps.

It is good for Lewis to mix with other young adults with different disabilities and gain a different perspective. It enhances his life.

100% - I know my siblings are having fun, meeting friends, learning new experiences and feeling safe.

It is so nice to know our son has a regular activity he enjoys, tailored to his needs.

Gives much-needed respite and time to unwind.

My son is a lot happier not being stuck with his parents.

Have we contributed to you or your family's happiness or general wellbeing?

We feel so much better being part of the Interest Link community. Before, we were isolated as a family.

It's been nice to see her branching out and getting that connection with the outside world, which will help her going forward.

Lewis particularly gets on well with Rosa. He can struggle to form good relationships with women, and this is very important to us.

Having a happy, self-confident young adult in the family affects the general wellbeing of everyone involved.

It's been great that Robbie is happy to go along independently and enjoys himself. He's made to feel welcome and looks forward to each session. There's been nothing like this available to him.

If Nicola is happy then we are happy. We've faced several challenging situations this year, and Nicola has talked them over with Joss as a friend, which has helped her wellbeing.

My mental health has improved.

He's a happy boy when he comes home.

Have we successfully created a safe environment, enabling them to make friends and giving them new opportunities and experiences?

Wonderful environment for him. Such kind people - Mary, Rosa and the volunteers. Great patience and understanding of SEN needs.

Absolutely! This cannot be stressed enough. Without this group Calum would have nowhere to meet people his own age and socialise.

We cannot thank you enough for the opportunities you provide. Always risk-assessed, safe, welcoming and inclusive.

This is the most important thing for my daughter. It's usually difficult to get her to try new things, but though she worries, she'll do them with the group.

Niamh loves going to Interest Link, so she can see her friends and join in different activities she wouldn't do at home.

Very safe environment, even on trips - very well organised, every detail thought of.

Danny enjoys each activity and spending time with the friends he made.

The space feels like a safe environment and gives a chance to talk to others.

Do they have more confidence and self-esteem?

Alistair was bullied at school and when he left at 16 he had no confidence. Interest Link has contributed greatly to giving him his self-esteem.

Calum is more willing to try new things now, and when plans change he can cope better.

One sister was very shy when they first came. Now she helps, talks to others, shares what she's been up to and helps others. She feels very safe and happy.

This has grown over the years, partly Nicola maturing but also the different situations and experiences she's done with Joss, which have given her confidence in new situations.

He has learnt so much from the groups, really come out of his shell and has great confidence.

Her confidence has excelled, which is brilliant to see.

She usually comes home full of chat about what she has done and who she chatted to.

So much more confident.

Are their social and communication skills better?

Much better - and these have developed over the last year. Even when she's out in the town now, she speaks to a lot more people.

From shy and unsure, all my sisters feel so safe and part of a team. You would never know now how shy they are - lovely friend groups.

Confident going along to the group by himself, which hasn't been the case for any other activity.

It's helping ease some of her mental health problems and helping her realise the whole world isn't a scary place.

She's always been a social person - now there's no stopping her.

Communication much better. They look and feel more confident.

He is getting better at asking for what he wants now.

Yes, they help more, chat more and feel safe with friends.

Is there anything else you want to tell us?

Rosa has planned amazing activities for everyone. One example last year was the Kiltwalk - what an experience to see everyone finish across the line with such pride and achievement. Rosa is amazing.

The consistent routine and the commitment, especially of Rosa and Mary, is commendable. This is a great group, offering different activities but also respecting that these adults are adults and treating them accordingly.

No improvements needed. Excellent service provided to our young people, and Mary is such a wonderful, gentle-hearted lady.

Aaron has been with Mary for many years and she has helped greatly in making him a more confident person. Other than Interest Link he has very little other support.

As a result of K attending his group, we as parents attend a Parents' Craft Group where we meet other parents and carers, share caring experiences and learn new skills.

Mary made Robbie feel comfortable from our very first meeting. Everyone has been very encouraging and supportive.

The Kiltwalk was a highlight - fundraising for activities really gives a sense of achievement. Interest Link provides opportunities to try a variety of things and provides challenges, like a night away.

Have you made friends with the people with learning disabilities you have volunteered with?

I have thoroughly enjoyed volunteering at Interest Link this past year and am looking forward to the next! Mary is incredibly supportive and friendly. I've made lots of meaningful relationships with the service users and I'm proud to be part of it.

Friendship is amazing and everyone is valued. Everyone respects one another and it feels like a family.

I have built up a lovely special friendship with the young lady I volunteer with.

My one-to-one link knows all about our family and vice versa. We enjoy each other's company so much and always have fun.

Everyone is very nice, and when I see them outside they say hi.

Have worked with a member for 10 years and have developed a very positive relationship - also with the family.

Everyone is very friendly and I feel I've made some lovely connections with the young adults in the group.

Can you give examples of differences in their happiness, confidence, self-esteem and social skills?

My service user has blossomed over the years and become a very confident young woman.

Each year I've been linked with Nicola I see her confidence growing, and a positive improvement in her social skills. For example, Nicola is confident ordering, paying and asking questions about a menu when out for a meal.

I have been recognised and warmly greeted by members in shops or on the street, even when I hadn't seen them first.

One service user was very shy and never volunteered information when I started, but now he'll tell me about himself when I see him at Interest Link or around Peebles. Really lovely to see.

I have seen great growth in one service user's confidence. He used to be very reserved and sit in the corner, reluctant to participate. Now he gets thoroughly involved and communicates with all of us.

Many of the service users who used to be quieter are now a lot more sociable.

My link chats to everyone and knows so many people where we live.

I supported a member in the cooking group recently - they were learning to cook and seemed more confident by the last session.

Since you started volunteering, have you become more confident socialising with people with learning disabilities and more aware of the barriers they face?

I've definitely become more confident and have learned that people with learning difficulties have happy, vibrant lives. I maybe see fewer barriers now than when I started - I'm aware of the challenges but don't see them as a barrier to socialising and having fun.

I have become more aware of the barriers they face daily and more confident socialising with them.

I feel quite at ease with people with learning disabilities now, not just those within the group but those in everyday life.

It has made me more confident in myself when interacting with people and knowing how to approach different situations.

I have learned so much through my voluntary role, as it goes hand in hand with the work I do for a living.

Definitely - I feel more confident helping, talking, socialising and getting involved.

I focus on the individuals rather than the disability, and try to be the same person for all.

Do you feel valued and supported by Interest Link and its staff?

Rosa does a fantastic job. She is amazing and makes everyone feel valued and supported. Thank you Rosa.

Mary keeps in regular contact - we have catch-ups over coffee every few months. I know I can ask if I need support or advice.

I feel very well supported by the staff. Mary and Chris are very supportive, look out for my mental health and check I'm okay.

I have received lots of valuable feedback from Mary and Rosa about our interactions with service users. That has given my self-esteem a huge boost.

The staff are incredibly supportive and make the sessions welcoming and engaging for everybody. You can talk to them about anything.

Mary's always checking up on our wellbeing. She's always thinking of volunteers.

Yes, all the staff are very helpful and willing to help with any queries.

Has volunteering with us met your hopes and expectations?

When I first started I was incredibly nervous about socialising, as I'm quite introverted and anxious. But I was happily surprised by the welcoming atmosphere. I feel I'm improving my own social skills while helping others develop theirs and expand their comfort zones.

I would say it has exceeded my expectations. I hoped it would be rewarding but difficult; instead it comes very naturally and is hugely rewarding. I look forward to the sessions and come home feeling happier and lighter!

In ways I didn't imagine. I thought I was the one helping, but it works both ways - the group are supportive of me! The cards and items they made cheered me up when I was absent.

Very much so - I didn't think I'd still be doing this 10 years on. It has helped me integrate into the community, as I was new to the area when I started.

It has exceeded them. I look forward to the sessions every week.

I have gained personal confidence through my years volunteering with Interest Link.

More than met hopes and expectations.

Do you have any other reflections about your volunteering experience or suggestions for us?

The group works brilliantly thanks to Rosa's sterling work. New members and volunteers would be warmly welcomed.

I have given Rosa ideas over the last year, most of which have been implemented.

I think Interest Link does a wonderful job providing friendship and activities for so many age groups. It's amazing how it has expanded over the 20-plus years I've volunteered. It brings joy to volunteers and service users alike.

It's great to get people from outside organisations to lead sessions - the storytelling with Franziska and the music with Mollie and Matt were excellent, and a really different way for people to express themselves.

I can't think of anything off-hand.

Tell us about your experience as a tutor

I have been leading gardening, nature-connection and craft sessions alongside Rosa for the Green Wanderers since 2022. It brings me great satisfaction supporting people to experience the benefits gardening can bring to health and wellbeing, particularly those who often face barriers to accessing the natural world. The Green Wanderers have achieved so much: stunning bulb and flower displays, their own vegetables and herbs, and crafty creations. They also clearly benefit hugely from simply being together in the green space.

One stand-out memory this year was with the quietest group member, during a tea break in the garden. She instigated the conversation with me for the first time and shared lots about herself and her hobbies. It made me think how the open space of a garden allows quieter people, or those who experience overwhelm, to be heard in a way that is often very challenging in big indoor groups.

Make That is a truly spectacular group! I teach crafting fortnightly to around 16 service users and their carers, so the tables almost fill the room. There is always lots of excitement and chat, and service users often show me things they have made, which we show to the whole group.

I love the warmth of the groups and their overall positive energy. Users, volunteers and facilitators are always up for everything, be it singing, dancing or just being silly. It's a real joy.

I am a musician and ran music sessions with two of the groups. Both were really enjoyable - the participants were fantastic and engaged well, and the staff and volunteers were all really friendly and helpful.

I really enjoy seeing the participants grow in confidence and enjoy being active. The class provides a supportive environment where everyone can take part, make friends and achieve at their own level.

Do our members with learning disabilities benefit from and develop their creativity in your sessions?

The Make That crafting activity has changed over the years, as the group has become so much more confident in their dexterity, coordination and creative decision-making, so I now prepare more challenging activities. I always provide extra materials, as many want to try the craft at home - which shows they are confident they can remember what we've done and make it on their own.

Gardening and the natural world are inherently creative. Members grow their plants from seed, nurture them and experience joy from the sight and scent of flowers, or cook and eat the produce - creating from the soil up!

I loved seeing the kids act out during the drama and storytelling workshop, joining in by dancing, clapping or singing. They engage and develop their creativity in their own way during the sessions, but also afterwards, still enjoying themselves.

In both music sessions I saw members develop their creativity through singing, percussion and sensory activities. They came up with great ideas and were very enthusiastic and keen to take part.

Participants have developed creativity through movement, props and responding to music. It has been lovely to see their confidence grow as they become more willing to try new movements and share ideas.

Do you feel valued and supported by Interest Link and its staff and volunteers?

Both Rosa and Mary are wonderful people who hold so much love, patience and warmth. A true joy to work alongside - always approachable, truly caring and professional.

Rosa regularly expresses that she values the service the Greener Peebles team and I provide to Interest Link.

I always feel supported by both staff and volunteers at Interest Link.

All help is provided to make the class successful. Rosa and I are in regular communication to guarantee all members have an enjoyable experience.

Very much so - staff and volunteers were very warm, welcoming and keen to support the activities.
Is there anything we can do to improve your tutor experience?
I've found it tricky recently to encourage volunteers and some support workers to pause their chats when I'm introducing activities or demonstrating the steps. Support with this would make it easier for me to explain and help everyone understand.
Allow me to share a bit more about the class.
Just continue the way you do it - and book me more!
Do you have any other feedback for us?
It is clear to see the broad variety of benefits Interest Link brings to their members, support workers, families and volunteers. The opportunities - social, creative, educational - are varied, inclusive and, above all, always lots of fun. I take my hat off to Rosa and the team who are so dedicated to the members and the work.
I also teach the Parents' Group monthly, made up of parents, siblings and carers. When new people begin they are understandably nervous, but they are welcomed into this lovely, friendly group. The craft activity gives people respite from their worries, builds their confidence, and helps them feel a sense of belonging in an often isolating, lonely position as a carer.
Just to say thank you for supporting so many individuals and bringing creativity and meaningful activities to them.
Interest Link is a fantastic scheme and creates a welcoming space for the group members. A lovely group.
Working with Interest Link members and adults with learning disabilities has helped me improve my skills - skills I hope to use during the rest of my career.

Do you feel we offer a safe and professional service?

100% a safe and professional space - the people love these groups.

I feel my client is safe at all times and the group is run exceptionally well.

Service users always feel safe and included. The activities always vary, which provides great stimulation and interest.

The Art and Gardening groups I have been to are great and run very professionally.

Lots of activities, days out and fun nights, all thought through thoroughly for my service user.

It is reassuring that the Interest Link staff have been long-standing, which creates such continuity for residents.

Very safe environment in venues and out in the community.

Do you think we provide needed opportunities that fill a gap in existing provision?

There are so few social groups for people with learning disabilities. Interest Link is a lifeline for lots of people.

There are not a lot of groups out there for vulnerable adults, so Interest Link plays a vital part in providing amazing groups.

Yes, 100%. This is a safe place where our service user can enjoy activities with friends. The organised days out are exceptional and always a fond memory afterwards.

A regular activity for clients and carers or families to meet up and have fun and a chat.

With all the cutbacks in Council funding, it is a vital role that you offer residents.

Absolutely - it gives members opportunities to be part of well-organised social opportunities.

Yes - not very many groups like this in the area.

Have you seen a difference in the happiness, confidence and social skills of members you are closely involved with?

My client's confidence has increased massively since joining the group. This has impacted her life at home, and this year she is becoming more independent - cooking, housework, shopping.

Our service user knows when we are coming to groups, and despite not being able to communicate verbally she lets us know how happy she is by laughing and smiling. She makes lots of happy noises and laughs with her friends.

More confident in interactions with people they don't know so much, and an opportunity for social relationships as part of a wider community.

Kiltwalk - all felt proud. Day trips - amazing experiences for them. Garden - love, and it builds confidence.

Our resident always looks forward to meeting up with Interest Link. We all recently thoroughly enjoyed the Peebles Disco - it was lovely for everyone to come together in a different setting.

The individual I support really enjoys all the activities and loves being part of a social group.

Member laughs all through her time at group and engages with other members.

Always happy to see friends at groups, and interacts in all activities where possible.

If you are closely involved with family carers, do you think we have supported them?

Mum and dad have been able to spend time with a new grandchild and go out on date nights.

When we attend groups it frees up time for her parents to do their own thing.

Allows mum to spend more time with her grandchild and spend time with friends.

Mum and dad have this spare time to spend with family members.

Do you have any other feedback or suggestions?

I don't know how this could be improved! Rosa goes over and above to provide a safe, professional and, most importantly, fun environment.

The activities planned are amazing for these young people - they have amazing fun in a safe environment. Rosa is fantastic.

The groups work perfectly as they are. I honestly don't think they could be any better. A big shout out to Rosa and team!

The group is run so well with lots of extra outings and activities. I can't see how it could be improved.

Rosa provides a fun-packed, full timetable of events through the year.

More of the same! You are all invaluable and provide wonderful opportunities for our residents.

Thank you for the work you guys do!

Matty is 14 years old and lives with his Mum, Emma. He has learning disabilities and has been in Tweeddale Champions Group for nearly 18 months. Matty took a long time to settle, and for the first months, he would only stay at the Group for a short time before wanting to go home. Emma would try leaving for a short time, but he got anxious and distressed so she came back to the Venue to sit with him. Matty didn't at first join in Group activities but accepted one peer mentor at a time playing a board game with him. He watched what was going on in the wider Group and started to seem happy to be there.

After some months, Matty decided his Mum should go home once they'd arrived at the Venue saying "Matty alone, Mum pick me up". He stayed on the periphery of the Group, but started to gradually join in activities, encouraged to do so by one of the peer mentors. In the past few months, Matty has been looking much more relaxed within the Group. He gets involved in all the activities eg taking part in Archery and Indoor Curling when it was his turn, and joining in Karaoke with other Group members, singing out the 'title' words. He also loves to dance on his own whenever he listens to music.

Matty says very little but understands much more. He picks one significant word or two out of a sentence spoken to him and repeats it. This was usually "home soon" at the beginning of his time in Champions; which later progressed to "group now, home later".

Matty's Mum Emma said: "He really enjoys his time at Champions Group. When he knows he has his Club on a Monday as we do his routine – big smiles; and when he comes home from school he can't wait to get ready and 'head'. When walking home from Champions Group he is happy and cheeky. He's had a good time."

Tony is a young man of 22 who has been in the Tweeddale Youth Group for a number of years. He has Downs Syndrome and until recently lived at home with his parents. He now lives independently in a flat opposite his parents' house where he receives one to one support from a local care agency.

Tony is fit and insists on walking to the Venue for Group sessions but accepts a lift home from one of the Group Leaders which his parents really appreciate. Tony is one of the first people to arrive at our Venue never misses the sessions unless he is ill or away on holiday. He is passionate about rugby and the local team and goes to all their games when he can, and loves being asked about the most recent Saturday game.

Tony interacts with others in the Group whilst doing activities and is happy to be helped when needed. He's got a good sense of humour and loves listening to jokes. Tony does not say a great deal. He speaks using short sentences, or one-word answers and rarely initiates conversation.

Tony's confidence has grown though over the years I've worked with him. There are particular people he likes to sit beside at the Group and I can see him relax. He smiles a lot when they speak to him. He takes part in all the activities at Front Runners no matter what we're doing. Tony now shows a maturity that he didn't have when he first joined us. He comes along to our new Catch Up Group in a local café where he meets with other Front Runners Group members to chat, have a coffee or juice and play dominoes or

similar games. He also meets up with friends he made in the Group previously and who have moved on. They attend our quiz nights together.

Tony's Mum Eileen says: "Tony has attended Interest Link for many years. He values the opportunity it provides to maintain contact with old friends, as well as widening his connections. He is a busy and very active young man – he enjoys the range of activities and balances attendance with involvement with another group focusing on his interest in sports!"

Jean is 31 years old and has DiGeorge Syndrome. She lives independently but her parents are very supportive. Jean first registered with us in 2014, when she was linked one-to-one for a time. In 2022 Jean joined Make That, our craft and chat group. She was quite shy when she first joined but has become more confident and chats more now. This year Jean also joined Green Wanderers our gardening and outdoors group, and has enjoyed gardening, fruit picking and making herb sachets. Jean also attends the Tweeddale social events including our Autumn Ball, summer trips and games evenings. She did the The Edinburgh Kiltwalk with other members to raise funds for Interest Link, and has used this as an opportunity to get fitter and now walks regularly.

Jean says, 'I love the happy friendly atmosphere at the groups and I look forward to going. I like to meet up with people that I am familiar with so I can be relaxed to have a chat with them. I manage to have conversations with people whereas before I would just go quiet and be embarrassed. I can now start a conversation off with someone outside the group where I couldn't do that before.'

Jean's support worker said, 'Jean is so much more confident in herself. She initiates conversations with people which she wouldn't do before and tries new tasks at home now without the hesitation she had before.' Her dad says 'Jean's involvement in the activities is a great help to her life and confidence.'

Cameron is 34 years old and has learning disabilities and lives at home with his mum. Cameron joined Motivators, our Wednesday evening social group in 2017, where he enjoys a variety of activities including games nights, food and music sessions, meals and evenings out.

In 2022 Cameron also joined Green Wanderers our gardening and outdoors group, which gives him the chance to enjoy a variety of activities outside in the Community Garden and to go on group trips. This year this has included a trip to Kailzie Gardens, Birkhill House to meet the alpacas and Border Berries.

Cameron gets on well with everyone in the groups and has become good friends with the other groups members. He is chatty, cheerful, fun, sociable and always arrives at group sessions with a big smile. Cameron is always up for a new challenge and has now completed the 'Wee Wander Challenge' at the Edinburgh Kiltwalk two years on the run, to help raise funds for Interest Link.

Cameron always attends our social events with his family if he can, and these provide another opportunity for him to meet up with his friends and to have fun. These events have included our beetle drives, bingo nights, quizzes and potluck suppers, sing-alongs, treasure hunts, our annual St Andrew's Day

meal and ceilidh, and last year Cameron and his family played a big part in helping us to arrange our first ever Autumn Ball.

Cameron says the groups make him feel happy and he is more confident because of the groups. His mum says, 'Cameron enjoys his groups and is so excited to attend. He feels safe at the groups. The groups give us some time apart from each other to do our own things and then we are able to tell each other about our day. I can go and do things for myself when Cameron is at the groups and I don't need to worry.'

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