



Case studies

2023-24

Case studies written by Branch Co-ordinators from November 2023 to May 2024, covering a broad age range and including members living with family carers or independently with support, some in 1:1 links and others in befriending groups.

Tweeddale case studies are not included because consent to share them widely was not given.

Berwickshire: Jokubus

Jokubus is 16 and joined Interest Link in March 2022 joining The Duns group first & now he also attends the Kelso Group. His parents are Lithuanian, so English is his second language, and he is autistic.

At times he has challenges in socialising & taking part in activities preferring to observe from a distance. He was quiet & shy when he first attended the group, now he has gained confidence & talks to other group members. He has settled into the group, is friendly to other group members & now initiates conversations.

His Mum has been amazed at the changes in Jokubus' social skills: He had been talking in a local shop to an Interest Link staff member which he had never done, the shop staff were also very pleased to see this interaction as they had never seen him speak before.

Jokubus has gained confidence since joining the group & has asked to join group WhatsApp he has made friends in the group with people from different schools and different towns.

Interest Link stayed connected with Jokubus when he was in hospital & recovering at home. We sent WhatsApp messages, text, letters card goodie bags. Some members visited him at home which was new to Jokubus. His Mum was so pleased that he had the confidence to shake hands & introduce himself to a visitor's son.

Berwickshire: Holly

Holly has recently joined Interest Links Duns Group. She is autistic, which had left her very socially isolated at school & in the community.

Holly is an active member in the group taking part in the group activities. She has made many friends in the group & been out with them socially, and has gained confidence, self esteem and independence since joining the group. Her communication skills have also grown, and she supports other group members with our arts & crafts sessions.

Berwickshire: Christopher

Christopher is 19 and in the Kelso Youth Group. He is autistic, had problems with anxiety and lacked confidence and communication skills to make friends. He particularly enjoyed the recent drama project with Borders Youth Theatre.

Christopher's mother said "Christopher has become more sociable & independent since attending, he always looks forward to every session and has much more purpose. His confidence & self esteem have also improved hugely. The improvement to Christopher's health & wellbeing is mainly because he feels he has a place he belongs."

She added that "It gives me valuable time to myself and has eased the strain on me, knowing that Christopher has something he looks forward to doing & he doesn't need my help to partake. Kate & her team are very welcoming & inclusive. There are no local opportunities to us, and Christopher and I would be devastated if he could not continue: it has become an extended family to him."

Central Borders: Yvonne

Yvonne is 22 years old.

“Hi my name is Yvonne, I joined Interest Link in 2017. I have always struggled with severe anxiety. I knew I had dyspraxia, but I was later diagnosed with Autism and a learning disability. At the beginning I struggled to speak at Interest Link and needed a lot of support.

“I was called Michael but later made the decision to change my gender and be Yvonne.”

“Interest Link has been very supportive and I love attending the cooking group, Brunch Bunch and gardening group and I will be starting Fruity Fitness soon. These groups have helped me with my confidence and help me enjoy socialising, they have been very important in helping me with my anxiety and I really enjoy being able to attend Interest Link.”



Central Borders: Milo

Milo is 10 years old and is autistic. He has quickly become a very popular member of our children's group with his thoughtful input and sense of humour. Milo and his mum explained the difference made:

"I have loved it, Interest Link is a wonderful group and has lovely kids and helpers who make it amazing. I love this group and the people in it and it has had a positive impact on me because I don't feel like I am being judged or like I have a deadline to do things by."

Milo's mum Leanne told us...

"The positive impact on his confidence is amazing. Milo has joined mainstream groups in the past but never fitted in. He loves the group and has achieved so much since starting. As an example, Milo felt that he was not good at arts and crafts and would often come home from school upset as felt he was failing at these activities. Since joining the group, Milo skips out at the end of an evening to show off what he has made and is proud to share his achievements! The support in the group enables him to try things and test his abilities in a relaxed and non pressured way and he succeeds. He has been able to transfer this to school and can now manage the things he finds difficult in a more positive way.



As a parent it is fantastic to watch how Milo instantly felt at ease and developed a strong sense of belonging. Milo is excited to be part of Interest Link and I am excited to keep watching his confidence and connections grow!"

Roxburgh: Haiden

Haiden is a 14 and has a learning disability and some difficulty with coordination. Haiden requires a lot of help with daily activities like getting washed and dressed and this has a huge impact on mum.

Haiden attends our Children's Group at Burnfoot Hub and also the Hawick High School group. He is always very smiley and excited to see the other group members, and gets a real sense of achievement from activities, which builds his self-esteem. At a recent session we created collage pictures and Haiden proudly told me "Masterpiece!" when he held his picture up for me to photograph.

Haiden's Mum and Dad attend parents evenings and events and love to see what Haiden has been doing. They have both said that he is really happy at Interest Link, and Mum gets a lot out of having Monday nights to herself. "The staff have been great especially Val: her communication, bubbly personality and trust/care all plays a huge part in taking these young people forward and helping them reach their goals. The opportunities and experiences are fantastic and gives them new skills. We would all be lost without Interest link , "A happy child is a happy family". This family can't thank you enough."



Roxburgh: Work- Life Balance

Craig is 24 years old and has been with Interest Link since he was 14. He has a moderate learning disability and lives with his parents.

Craig had very little self-belief, but challenging roles in drama productions have seen him grow in confidence and enhance his social skills. Group members supported and encouraged Craig to apply for a local job, and he was delighted when he got work at his local Morrisons Superstore. He is now a role model to other younger less confident members and has inspired them that they can also find meaningful jobs in their local community by believing in themselves.

Craig was nervous about asking for shifts that would allow him to attend Panto Practice sessions over the Winter months, when his employer granted these days off, he was overjoyed. It offered him an opportunity to discuss with his boss what he does in his leisure time and how important it was to him to be able to find a work-life balance benefiting his health and wellbeing.

Craig has now become a member of the checkout team at Morrisons, and we are all very proud of him. This year in Panto he expressed that he wanted to take on the challenging role of a "Baddie." Craig achieved his greatest acting role to date.

Craig's Mum said "It gives him an avenue for friendship and new skills, and it gives us a bit of respite on a regular basis. We're really pleased with how he has come on in the group and love seeing him in the shows."

Berwickshire: Joe

Joe is 36. He suffered a brain injury as a toddler which caused his learning disability. Following the death of his father he has been living with his sister and her family in an isolated location for the past two years and had fallen into severe depression. When I met with Joe he had nothing to do and no friends.

Joe first attended our Coldstream Friday Club and fitted right in. Joe also enjoyed a residential and was involved in planning the trip. Joe then started attending our Health and Wellbeing/Art group in Kelso which he loves: he now has a full art kit of his own and enjoys practising what he learned with us at home. Joe has also joined our Cooking Club in Duns and is independently using the bus, so is less reliant on his sister. He is now meeting up with his friends in clubs unrelated to Interest Link such as Boccia.

Joe said "I had lost my confidence through the lockdowns and these groups have helped me build it back up. Being at the sessions makes me feel like part of a group and part of the community. I enjoy the art class."

Joe's sister said:

"Interest Link has given me time & space, and as a family with young children this is invaluable. I can also plan time with friends too, looking after my own mental health.

Interest Link has given Joe structure in his week and a place to be himself with others with similar interests. Seeing his confidence grow and friendships start to form is such a gift. Angela and her team's work is why Joe's mental health is in such a positive place and by proxy having a positive impact on my husband's & my own mental well being.

Interest Link is the only organisation which has delivered and made a meaningful and positive impact for Joe, my husband and myself. Joe is enjoying all the groups he is attending and likes that his ideas & feedback are respected."

Central Borders

Phillip is 25 and lives with his Mum, Dad and 2 siblings. He is also an Uncle to his niece and nephew, and they are a close and loving family. Phillip has Downs Syndrome and his mother, Zayna is his full-time carer. He joined our Brunch Bunch when it started last year and has settled in brilliantly, he is also now part of our baking group and youth group.

Phillip says the groups are awesome and that he feels so happy when he is with the lads Ronnie and Richard at the baking. He loves the Brunch Bunch and Zayna attends this too. Phillip is currently working on a play for radio with the youth group and will shortly be starting a gym class with a volunteer on a 1:1 basis. They are both very excited about this as Phillip has wanted to attend the gym for a long time.

Zayna said she loves to see Phillip so happy and that he is so settled with his Interest Link routine - she loves to see him coming home buzzing and also loves the treats he makes at classes. Zayna feels very much that the groups give her time to spend alone with her husband and her other children whilst also making sure that she has some respite from her caring role – she might go and get her nails done or go shopping – and she values this time for herself and for Phillip. Zayna connects with other carers at Brunch Bunch and very much enjoys the company and the group dynamic which she didn't expect -she says she feels quite emotional thinking about the impact the groups have on her and Phillip.



We are very glad to have them with us.

Lisa and Katherine (also Jim at cooking group)

Katherine is 29 and recently moved up from England with her mum and grandmother. Katherine suffers from a lung condition as well as autism and a learning disability. Katherine lacks confidence and was initially worried about noise and meeting too many new people at once, and we were thrilled when she accepted our invitation to the Brunch Bunch pilot.

Katherine felt comfortable even as the group grew and agreed to try out our bigger Monday group. Her mum Lisa recalls the first visit. “When we arrived we could hear the laughter right away, I thought the noise might worry Katherine but she turned me and said ‘I like this – I am staying’”. As Lisa and I sat and chatted recently we saw Katherine and two others playfully bickering with the tutor, and the giggles were clearly heard over the room. Katherine then visited each table for a chat.

Lisa said “Katherine was all but purring with happiness on the way home: we are part of the community and she is so happy. It is wonderful to see Katherine’s character coming out and to see her progressing and happy, and this impacts positively on me too.

The Local Area Co-ordinator Stella said “Everyone I know who is involved in Interest Link speaks of their excitement to attend groups, as do their family and carers. For many people after lockdown it's been daunting to go back to activities, but Interest Link have helped to ease people back in with reassurance and care. Interest Link also helps with carer stress, giving family time to concentrate on other things aside from their caring role.”



Roxburgh

Molly in the Lifeskills Group

Molly is in her late 40`s and has Down Syndrome. She recently moved with her elderly parents from England to Jedburgh. She is a member of our Growing Interests lifeskills group in Hawick, a new group that teaches everyday skills whilst having fun. Molly is very isolated, and loves coming along to the group to see her friends.

The group has allowed Molly to learn skills such as numeracy, budgeting and handling money at a pace that suits her, and with support from other members. Success is always celebrated, however small. The group also gives Molly a chance to socialize and share time with friends over a community lunch, and she feels much happier talking with people in a group now.

Molly says "It is good fun, and I learn lots of things with my new friends. It's a really cool group and makes me feel good about myself"

Molly's mum told me that "The service provided is excellent and it has made a huge difference to Molly, who needs the interaction of other adults her age outside the family. She looks forward to her time with the different social groups, and always comes back describing her time away and what she has managed to complete. Her communication skills are definitely improving, she is learning to do a bit more outside the home, and may even start using the local buses. We can have a few hours enjoying things we like to do without worrying, and it has definitely eased my role as a carer."

Roxburgh

Lorna in the “News Hound” Team and Caledonian Group

Lorna is in her 50`s and has a learning disability. Lorna has recently moved to Hawick from Kelso where she lived with elderly parents. She now lives in a flat with another of our members and it has been tough settling into a new town with few friends and she was very anxious.

Lorna has joined two groups at Interest Link Roxburgh: our new Newsroom Group and the long-established the Caledonian Group. She now travels independently to the groups and feels very relaxed, thoroughly enjoying her time with other members and volunteers.

Lorna has learnt many new skills in the Newsroom Group such as report writing, interviewing and discussing ideas for articles. Lorna is now able to confidently talk about her experiences to staff and house partner. Time away from the house has allowed her to experience new things, widen horizons and be challenged with new and interesting topics. She has said she has now found a group of friends that she can feel confident and totally relaxed with, and is generally less anxious around new people.

Staff have expressed how animated she has become and how proud she is of her many challenges that she has been able to overcome. Staff are interested in her progress and encourage her to chat about her experience. Staff can in turn spend quality time with the other member in the house.

Roxburgh

Alison in the "News Hound" Team.

Alison has a learning disability and is in her early 40`s. She lives independently in a small village near Hawick and has no social interactions with anyone apart from her elderly parents. They have tried on many occasions to introduce her to people in the village and suggested she joins in with local activities and clubs, but Alison says she has no confidence and is very wary about meeting new people. Local Area Co-ordinator Amanda asked if I would meet up with Alison. Alison was very hesitant at first but I suggested that she join our new Newspaper Group and she decided she would give it a go.

The Tutor slowly introduced Alison to tasks in the group, and she has made friends within the group and feels very safe and valued. She can express herself with confidence, offer suggestions, and works effectively and independently alongside others as a valued team member. Alison is learning report writing, interviewing, and researching information outwith the group and manages to share all of this through WhatsApp.

Alison also recently joined an two-night trip to Haggerston Caravan Park with a large group from the Roxburgh Branch. She was very excited, and we are very proud of how far Alison has come. Alison`s Mum and Dad have seen a huge change in Alison`s confidence, are really pleased with her progress and glad she has found new friends.

Alison said "I have met some lovely people. that are understanding. Confidence has grown, learned a lot. It has shown me I am not alone in things I find difficult. Working together means u all have an input what you are doing.



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friendship connections