

Interest Link Borders. Children and Young people's Project Case Studies

This is a selection of case studies collected from across the branches, showing the difference Interest Link has made. All names have been changed.

Berwickshire Children's Group

Becca is a 13 year old child with autism who lives with her parents. She finds it difficult to take her turn, can be very loud, can ask streams of questions, finds it difficult to play with others and can be very anxious. Mum has tried to place her in another mainstream group of young people but explained this was not working out well.

She joined our Childrens Group 8 months ago. To accommodate the present needs of all the children in the group session we start with their choice of board games, draw a themed picture and talk about it, make a craft then play fun group games with everyone together, often finishing with a boisterous game.

We have requested advice from mum, an Autism specialist and we have worked with the volunteers so they know the best way to help Becca to get the best from the group. With gentle reminders about how to take turns, what and how to say things appropriately and guidance about what to do next she has settled well into the group and is keen to come along. Her drawing talent is much admired and it helps her to form her thoughts to then tell us her picture's story. She is very proud of this.

Becca has said she likes being in the group. Mum says that Becca's 'confidence to be with others has grown a lot' because of her being in the Childrens group 'where she is accepted as she is'. She also feels pleased that 'Becca will not be so frightened by older teenagers when she goes up to secondary school next year'.

Berwickshire 1:1 Link: Lauren & Emma

Lauren is an 11year old girl who lives with her younger sister and Mum. She and her mum have learning disabilities and Lauren is also very active and impulsive for which she receives medication.

Emma, a 22year old volunteer, was linked with Lauren in May 2013 and initially both played games, did craftwork and other activities only at home. Her mum said that the most Lauren could concentrate on any one activity was about 10mins. Indeed, this was the case initially where she would jump from one activity to another, frequently check things with her mum, argue with her sister and occasionally run out of the house.

With Mum's consent Emma tried various approaches and found that as time passed Lauren was able to concentrate more on their activities, on one occasion up to 45 mins! Mum said she felt this was because Lauren liked Emma, liked having the 1-1 contact, liked choosing the activities they did together and that things were done at Lauren's pace.

Recently, Emma and Lauren have had a lot of fun going out and about to swing parks, for walks, collecting conkers and chatting. Lauren asked lots of questions about why people behave this way or that, questions about Emma's life and well as share her own thoughts. They also kept a scrapbook together with photos of what they did and a brief description of their outings - which mum said Lauren treasures.

Emma found Lauren became more relaxed, responsive and engaged the more time passed and said she felt that she has definitely had a impact on Lauren's life which she feels good about.

Mum says Lauren is very fond of Emma and she feels the friendship has been very helpful in helping Lauren grow up. Mum has also been pleased as it 'allowed her to spend time with Lauren's younger sister'.

Emma said of the link: "I am so chuffed to have had the opportunity to befriend Lauren. I really couldn't have enjoyed it any more and to hear how appreciative her mum is and also to watch her have fun and learn and develop, made me even happier."

Central Borders Children's Group

Michael is 11 years old and lives with his family of mum, dad and a younger brother. They are a strong and happy family but mum was keen for Michael to have more social activities out with the home.

Michael had joined mainstream groups before and had attended but became bored with doing the same things. I was able to tell him about the wide variety of activities that we do at our group sessions and he was happy to give us a whirl. I encouraged him to think up activities he would like to do as well and explained that we tried to incorporate all suggestions when we could. Michael said he would like to do baking with chocolate and as luck would have it; our second session was with our fabulous baking tutor so he was delighted! Since then he has truly settled into the group and found his niche within the team. He is a cheerful lad who fully engages with all our activities and has so far enjoyed a photo booth session, Halloween night, crafts and movie night.

His mum feels that he truly enjoys all the sessions and that he is well settled into our routine and sessions. It's a pleasure for us to have his sunny nature!

Quote from Mum

Interest link has given Michael a new lease of life, he is happy to come along and will remind me when it is on. When he returns from his Monday night he is happy and confident. He will happily share what he has been doing that week with his friends at school. This has been a turn-around for Michael as before he did not want to go out in the dark at night, also he would leave a club when the dark nights came due to not wanting to leave the house when it is dark. But he is now going to his other groups as well in the dark nights. This I put down to interest link build his confidence and independence that is encouraged at the group. Please keep up the good work. Michael loves all the activities that you carry out mainly when you are cooking.

Roxburgh Children's 1:1 link. Jodie & Diana

Diana had been a volunteer with children with emotional difficulties and wanted to offer her time to Interest Link Roxburgh. Diana was apprehensive at first but was happy to learn about learning disability as she felt that she required a little more confidence in herself and her abilities.

I linked Diana with Jodie who attends Roxburgh Children's Group. Jodie has grown with our children's group from a young 9 year old into a mature 12 year old who now attends High School. It was time for Jodie to have a 1 to 1 link, a special person for her to rely on and to be herself with. Diana was that person and what's more they had met in a former life at Riding for the Disabled and hadn't realised until they both met at Jodie's house.

Jodie and Diana have been supported by the Branch Co-ordinator for 4 weeks now and the next visit out socially is to Kelso Garden Centre for a hot chocolate. Diana is growing in confidence and believes in her own abilities. Jodie is wild with excitement about her visit out with Diana and mentions it all the time at group meetings. Jodie has a small brother, and mum and dad think that it is a great idea that Jodie has time out for herself and they have time to themselves too.

After the Garden Centre Jodie is excited about visits to the cinema, dog walking, and visits to Edinburgh shopping. The fact that Jodie has had a chance to experience a group setting where she has found friends and people of school age to relate to her has given her the confidence and the skills to embark on a special one to one relationship with a very special volunteer. She is now ready to build up a relationship with somebody who she knows is giving up their time to spend with her solely. She will continue her journey where she will learn more social skills, respect, and the value of friendship and have just as much fun as she will continue to have in the Children's group. A very lucky person who has the best of both worlds.

Roxburgh Children's Group

David has Autism and has been in the Roxburgh Children's Group for the last year. David was very unsure about coming along initially and was very adamant that he wouldn't like being in the taxi run with other people. David was very isolated and at the time when I first met him he was very quiet and unhappy looking as he wasn't looking forward to going to Jedburgh High School from Primary School.

David's mum was very happy with the service that we could offer David and thought it would be good for him to become more sociable and have fun. His Social Worker had referred David and was very keen for us to be involved in David's life so that David could look forward to something special where he met up with other people socially to have fun.

After a shaky start and a few missed nights David grew in confidence and sat with our session worker Martin who had met at his house previously. He sat out of activities a few times and watched intently from the sidelines. Slowly David began to sit with the other group members and joined in on baking sessions, and craft sessions and Bat Box making. After seeing great progress even if it was very small initially, David began to get involved in our Outdoor Project with Anna Craigen, and that was the moment it all changed. He talked about coming to the group when at home and was ready for his pick up every session. Anna had a lovely way with him and got him personally involved in whittling sticks for marshmallows and taught him how to safely use a penknife. When it came to Drama, well move over Ant and Dec: David and Rob were the perfect substitutes. They were a hard act to follow. For David to be part of Roxburgh's Got Talent (video is at <http://www.interestlink.org.uk/videos.htm>) was truly amazing, he not only took on the role of Ant but was the perfect cameraman too. David has proved that autism doesn't have to be a barrier to making friends and belonging. David is now a very important member of our group who has been accepted by all other members and respected for who he is and who he chooses to be.

Central Borders Youth group member 1:1

Julia joined us back in 2012 but had recently moved into her own new tenancy and did not start participating in activities with us until 2013. She is a lively 23 year who loves to be out and about when she can and loves to meet new people.

Her first link with us was to evening classes in baking at Borders College with a volunteer and this went very well for them both but Julia truly engaged with us when we were able to offer her a place within our adult group sessions. The groups consist of 1:1 links doing various planned activities for 6 weeks at a time and Julia has so far enjoyed skin care and make up, baking and crafts. Julia is very happy to meet new volunteers within each class and loves to take all her baking or crafts home. Other friends of Julia's also attend the classes so it's a very lively and sociable night out with lots of laughs. Lisa and Julia were informally linked within the classes and now attend all classes as a pair with a real friendship developing between them. Lisa gains just as much as Julia from the experience and says she hopes to be with Interest Link for a long time to come as she enjoys not only meeting people and feeling good about volunteering her time, but also likes meeting new friends.

Isabel and Jodie Roxburgh 1:1 young person's link

Isabel and Jodie were first linked up with each other in April 2014. Jodie is a retired lady who works in Morrisons one day a week and contacted Interest Link to ask if she could offer some volunteering time.

Jodie is a very outgoing vivacious person who has a lot to offer. I was keen to link her up with Isabel, a teenage girl of 17 years as I thought the volunteer would be a great influence and mentor for Isabel who required support to make good decisions in her life regarding friends and lifestyle choices.

The age gap was a large one but the gamble paid off. Isabel currently lives with her mother, father and two sisters, but was in great need of a special person in her life to talk to about teenage issues and also to have fun. Jodie is a granny herself and spends a lot of valuable time with her teenage grandchild and it was thought that she could use this energy and vitality with Isabel in an organised link. Isabel is a very able service user but an extremely vulnerable individual and is at a crossroads in her life where she requires extra tender loving care and the right support to allow her to make the right choices in life. Jodie is an experienced mature lady with lots of life experience and a positive attitude to life.

The link has been a very successful one and there is no stopping their friendship, it has grown from strength to strength. Isabel enjoys thoroughly her time with Jodie and they enjoy nothing more than a chat and coffee, putting the world to rights, suppers out, visits to the cinema, shopping trips to Edinburgh, and visits to McDonalds. Their recent social visit has found them both on a train from Edinburgh to Inverkeithing over the Railway Bridge where they stopped to have lunch together in a little café in Inverkeithing. Jodie and I agree that the link has been the best thing that has happened to Isabel as she is able to talk to Jodie about college, friends,

homelife, and her saturday job in a Café in Hawick. Jodie has many words of wisdom to offer Isabel and is only too pleased to talk through and advise on anything that is troubling Isabel. Isabel`s words on a text summed her feelings about Jodie when I asked her how the link was going? She replied, “Yeah it is really good, she`s the best lady I have ever met”.