



# ***Unique Opportunities***

## **An Evaluation of Interest Link Borders**

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*Mike Nicholson, Development Manager, Befriending Network (Scotland)*

## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY / KEY FINDINGS**

Interest Link Borders provides an excellent example of a local befriending project which has developed to provide a region-wide service bringing on board interested parties across a wide geographical area and providing a service that is highly valued. The staff team, the committee structure and specifically the work of the Project Co-ordinator are found to have formed a solid foundation for the project.

Volunteers, referral agencies, parents and carers and service users generally report high levels of satisfaction with the project and the way in which it is managed.

Volunteers gain a sense of satisfaction from their impact on the lives of people with learning disabilities. Parents and carers, volunteers and referral agencies generally report that the link relationships provide unique 1:1 opportunities for service users that lead to improvements in their self-confidence and self-worth. Additional benefits include the provision of respite for family carers.

These results mean that the project is meeting its aims of providing opportunities for adults with learning disabilities to pursue leisure and social activities of their choice in the community.

The project is seen by all to have a unique role in the support offered to people with learning disabilities in the Borders and there is a strong desire to ensure that its services are made available to a larger group. The project now has the challenge to build on its successful expansion and to use its creative style to develop further opportunities for people with learning disabilities.

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

### **a) Aims of Interest Link Borders**

The aim of Interest Link Borders is to provide an opportunity for adults with learning disabilities to pursue leisure and social activities of their choice in the community. The project intends the outcomes of these links to include improvements to service users' quality of life, assistance for them in acquiring social skills, improvements in their self-confidence and a greater sense of independence. Furthermore, the project aims to break down the barriers between people with learning disabilities and the community in general and to foster the ideals of care in the community. The project aims to address the fact that although most adults with learning disabilities live in the community they are often excluded from it, with few social contacts, little experience at making friends or too many barriers such as difficulties in accessing transport.

### **b) History of the Project**

Interest Link Berwickshire started in 1990 and was initially run by a voluntary management committee. As the need to co-ordinate activities grew, the committee sought funding to employ a staff member to manage the service. This was achieved in 1996 with funding from the Voluntary Community Care Forum when the First Coordinator was appointed on 10 hours a week. As the service developed in Berwickshire, a feasibility study in 1999 found that 275 of 375 adults with learning disabilities across the Borders said that they would use a service such as Interest Link. As a result in 2000 Interest Link Borders was created, and with funding from the Community Fund, Nationwide Foundation and Lloyds TSB Foundation, a Borders-wide Service was able to be launched in 2001 with the addition of part-time staff to cover three more areas within the Borders.

At the end of 2003 the project had 212 registered service users (from a potential total of 375), 107 volunteers and 91 active links across the Borders. In addition at the start of 2004, there were 23 links in place at evening classes at Borders College under the recently launched Buddies initiative, a large scale public awareness raising exercise was underway, and the project supported a number of small scale initiatives including group activities for service users and a pilot linking a student placement as a volunteer.

### **c) Geography of the Area**

The Scottish Borders comprises four traditional districts within a unified local area authority and health authority, coupled with the common sense of Borders identity. The area provides a varied set of locations including large towns such as Kelso, Galashiels, Hawick, and Peebles, as well as outlying rural areas and coastal towns.

### **d) Comparison with other Befriending Projects**

Interest Link Borders can be described as a befriending project although it tends not to use this definition in its publicity. It has always used the basis of 'going out to do activities' as the main appeal of the project to both service users and volunteers, partly because this initially implies less of a personal commitment than befriending. Although the relationships are initially all activity or interest-based, the Project Coordinator says that most become like befriending relationships where trust develops over time and the benefits of the relationship go beyond the activity that brought people together. The interest or activity that people are linked to do is therefore a means to building relationships.

In terms of the scale of the project, Interest Link is one of the larger befriending projects in Scotland with 8 part-time staff involved in administering and supporting

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over 90 links, and it has the widest geographical spread of staff of any project in the Befriending Network (Scotland) membership of 260.

The Co-ordinator's view is that branches with Co-ordinators working in the range of 17.5 - 20 hours could handle 'no more than 30-35 links' without a substantial increase in resources. This figure is higher than the numbers managed by many befriending projects in Scotland, which would handle the same number of links with a full time staff member and is far removed from 'a full time staff member supporting 15-20 befriending relationships' noted in Befriending Network (Scotland)'s Code of Practice<sup>1</sup>. However the project does support many more fortnightly and monthly links than most projects, which alters the amount of work involved per relationship. In addition because the project has an overall Project Co-ordinator with responsibility for large scale fundraising, policy development and strategic planning, this means that Branch Co-ordinators can concentrate on a higher caseload of links.

As with many befriending projects which do not set a particular time limit on relationships, Interest Link Borders has a long waiting list of potential service users, all of whom are registered with the project but currently unmatched. The project takes some steps to include those on the waiting list in social activities and they keep them informed of the project's ongoing work through newsletters.

### **e) Structure, Governance and Staffing**

Interest Link Borders consists of four area offices or branches (Berwickshire\*, Central, Galashiels, Roxburghshire\*) each with part-time project staff (Branch Co-ordinators). Two of the areas\* have additional part-time administrative support.

The project has a total of 20 hours management staff (Project Co-ordinator), 70 hours project staff (Branch Co-ordinators) and 12 hours administrative staff per week.

The Branch Co-ordinators are managed by the Project Co-ordinator, and each Branch has its own locally appointed Branch Committee. The overall project is managed by the Management Committee which has Branch Committee representation. Most of the committees include representatives from referral agencies, voluntary sector, volunteers, carers and service users. The staff team, the Branch Committees and the management committees all meet on a two monthly cycle which allows for reporting back and communication.

### **f) Criteria of the Project**

The project aims to provide a service for adults over 16 years of age, and there is no upper age limit. The service is available for all people with learning disabilities who are not able to live entirely independently. The project is unable to support people where the level of personal care required is higher than volunteers are trained to provide, and this is assessed on a case by case basis as people are referred.

### **g) Funding / Costs of the Project**

The annual running costs of the project are currently in the region of £80,000. The Borders-wide development of the project is funded by mainly by the Community Fund, with additional support from the Nationwide Foundation and Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland until the end of November 2004.

Local authority funding through the social work department has been given over the years to the Berwickshire office (£1700 per annum) and more recently Borders Council have also supported the Buddies Scheme (£5000) and the awareness raising survey (£4000). The Council rejected a bid to support the Borders-wide expansion three years ago.

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The project quadrupled in income with the Borders-wide development and the challenge is to sustain and develop this after the initial period of funding ends in November 2004. The current plans for future funding include an imminent approach to Borders Council for support with core project office costs, approaches to current funders for continued support, and returning to funders from whom applications were withdrawn when the Borders -wide service was successfully funded from other sources.

### **h) Evaluation**

A previous evaluation of Interest Link Berwickshire was carried out in 1998 prior to the expansion to become Interest Link Borders. It highlighted some procedural and developmental recommendations. The majority of these have been undertaken since then, in many cases to an advanced level. See Appendix C for the detail of this.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The evaluation is based on the following components:

- Discussion with Project Co-ordinator on project history and practice;
- Telephone discussion with two Committee members;
- Informal group meeting with three project staff;
- Follow individual telephone discussion with four project staff;
- Telephone survey with 15 volunteers;
- Telephone survey with 11 parents/carers (six were professional carers and five were family carers);
- Telephone survey with eight referral agencies;
- Focus Group discussion with 14 service users;

Appendix A has further details on the methodology.

#### **4. STRENGTHS OF INTEREST LINK BORDERS**

In discussions with staff and management committee the commonly held view was that the strengths of the organisation were as follows:

##### **a) Strength - Responding to Need**

The project provides a response to need:

- it meets a definite need for adults with learning disabilities in the Borders;
- it has communicated that need effectively to funders and gained support.

*“A service user gets the best possible experience they can have – they want to do an activity and they want to do it with someone who isn’t a parent or carer.”*

*“Interest Link does what it says on the box.”*

*“The organisation is really delivering on what it set out to do.”*

##### **b) Strength - Ethos / Style of Working**

The project has a strong ethos of professionalism, an imaginative approach and a friendly, informal style:

- it is creative and works in different ways without taking unnecessary risks;
- it is ambitious e.g. doing Investors in People since the Borders-wide expansion;
- it is flexible enabling it to work differently in local areas depending on local factors;
- it is informal but is backed by policies and procedures;
- it deals with problems immediately.

##### **c) Strength - Organisational Structure / Staff Structure**

The project has a clear management and branch committee structure and a staff team with strong leadership:

- the committee structure of the management and branch committees provides a clear structure able to cope with local demands and regional development;
- the project is well connected with key people involved on branch committees in each area;
- service users, volunteers, professional and family carers are represented on, and give breadth to the branch committees;
- there is strong support from the centre and avoidance of duplicating work;
- there is a committed staff team who have remained in post for over two years;
- the staff team have a range of skills and experience from previous employment e.g. volunteers management, nursing, training, learning disabilities;
- the staff are well supported by the Project Co-ordinator;
- the structure is perceived to be strong enough to cope with any individual member of staff leaving.

*“We’ve appointed an able and committed staff team.”*

*“It’s tremendous to see the way it has blossomed.”*

*“The Co-ordinator is very tenacious, very organised and up to date and knows what needs to be done. He has ensured that we have not run before we can walk.”*

*“We have an ear to the ground in each area.”*

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### **d) Strength - Volunteers**

The experience that the project can offer volunteers and the abilities of volunteers are seen as strengths:

- Volunteers gain job experience;
- Volunteers gain high quality training;
- Volunteers know their limits;
- Volunteer retention rate is very high at every branch.

*“The volunteers are Interest Link”*

### **e) Strength - Strategic Work**

The project has made every effort to be informed and relevant and to develop accordingly:

- Interest Link Borders has worked hard at becoming a natural part of the care landscape.

### **f) Strength - Internal Structures**

The project is underpinned by a structure of systems and procedures;

- Investors in People – this structure gives direction and guidance to the support of volunteers, committee members and staff members;
- the structure and cycle of committee meetings;
- finances are always available for volunteers' expenses – staff don't have to worry about this;

## **5. WEAKNESSES OF INTEREST LINK BORDERS**

Staff and management committee members were also able to identify current and potential weaknesses of the scheme. In the main these relate to balancing the desire to grow the service to meet demand with the need for sustainability and meeting the challenges of delivering a larger scheme.

### **a) Weakness - Demand and Resources**

The project is currently not able to meet the demand and those people who want the service often have to wait to get it:

- there is a large waiting list of service users;
- service users have to wait to be matched, often for a number of months;
- finding sufficient volunteers to take on the longer term commitment of this type of volunteering opportunity is difficult;
- it is difficult for staff to maintain sufficient contact with links if they take on too big a caseload.

*“Its main weakness is its success. It can't provide a service for the demand that is there.”*

*“The need is quite vast.”*

### **b) Weakness - Future Resources**

The project is currently funded until the end of 2004:

- there is a question mark over the sustainability for the larger project;
- the project needs to take care and not grow beyond the number of links it has the resources to manage.

*“We don't want Interest Link to be a flame that goes up for a year or two and then dies down”*

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### **c) Weakness - Project's Position Locally**

The work involved in developing local contacts may not pay off;

- there is the potential of not being viewed as a priority by the local authority;
- it takes time to build up relationships with agencies in each local area.

### **d) Weakness – Practice and Procedures**

Project procedures are still relatively new and may need more work:

- it takes time to process volunteers;
- some matches don't work out;
- there is some uncertainty whether current procedures which may vary between area offices are the best means of undertaking reviews of links;
- there is some uncertainty whether current procedures are the best means of undertaking risk assessments;
- skills shortage – although there is a team who complement each other, some individual staff feel that they lack personal skills in particular areas e.g. training, recruitment.

## **6. VOLUNTEERS**

### **a) Co-ordinators' Experience of Volunteer Recruitment**

Branch Co-ordinators reported generally positive experiences of recruiting volunteers with local advertising in newspapers, volunteer centres and word of mouth proving to be the most effective. Some volunteers were also staff from some of the agencies that Interest Link Borders works with.

*"The benefit that volunteers get is that they bring a noticeable benefit to the service user. There is a definite sense of satisfaction for them."*

### **b) Profile of the Volunteers**

The profile of the 15 volunteers interviewed show some broad themes:

- 11 female and four male volunteers. Overall the project reports an average of 28% male and 72% female volunteers, a higher proportion of male volunteers to the majority of befriending projects (the average is 20%);
- one is in the 20-29 age range, one in the 30-39 age range, three in the 40-49 age range and five each in the 50-59 and 60-69 age ranges.  
Overall the project reports that 6% of volunteers are under 30, 31% are aged 31-45, 37% are aged 46-60 and 26% are aged over 60. This is an older age profile than most befriending projects (other than those supporting older people). In most befriending projects the 25-40 age range has a stronger representation;
- seven of the volunteers had volunteered with other agencies before they became involved in Interest Link Borders while eight had not. The project has therefore encouraged a high proportion of local people who were not already doing so to volunteer in their community;
- at the time of the survey five of the volunteers interviewed had been involved for less than six months, four each for 6-12 months and 12-24 months, and two for over two years. The scheme reports very high rates of retaining volunteers.

### **c) Motivation for Volunteering**

Volunteers were asked to give their main reason for volunteering at Interest Link Borders:

- six noted that they had spare time e.g. through early retirement, and that they wanted or needed to do something they saw as worthwhile;
- three noted that they wanted to help other people in some way;
- two wanted to gain experience;
- two wanted opportunities to meet people and do new activities;
- two had an interest in people, or specifically people with learning disabilities.

Asking volunteers what they were hoping to get out of volunteering at Interest Link Borders when they started revealed more about their motivations. Two thirds of volunteers (10) noted that they were hoping to help somebody or do something worthwhile and get satisfaction from this.

*"A feeling of being worthwhile – useful and helpful.*

*"Not hoping to get anything – seeing pleasure in others."*

When asked how their experience had matched their expectations, half of the volunteers (8) said that volunteering at Interest Link Borders had been better than they expected, while four said it had been about what they expected. The remaining three were unsure or said it was too early to comment.

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More detailed questions revealed a broader range of motivations underlying why people had become volunteers at Interest Link Borders. They have a strong desire:

- to help the community (11 volunteers stated that this was ‘important’ (3) or ‘very important’ (8));
- to help people with learning disabilities (13 volunteers stated that this was ‘very important’);
- to spend time with people with learning disabilities (12 stated that this was ‘important’ (4) or ‘very important’ (8)).

Volunteers also stated that it was ‘very important’ (13) or ‘important’ (2) to do something rewarding.

There was virtually no link between gaining an award and volunteering at Interest Link Borders, and the link between volunteering helping with people’s careers was also weak (this was only ‘important’ or ‘very important’ for two volunteers). The most varied response was around whether people were motivated by the chance to receive training or not.

The reasons given by volunteers for taking part in the project tended to be more altruistic than focused on self-interest. Based on this division, there were 31 responses giving reasons of ‘self interest’ as being important or very important, and 42 responses giving ‘altruistic reasons’ as being important or very important. This mirrors results from the only major research undertaken on befrienders’ motivation.<sup>2</sup>

N=15	S= self-interest	A = altruism	Scale of Importance					Don't know
			Not at all 1	2	3	4	Very 5	
						2	13	
					1	1	13	
					3	4	8	
				2	2	3	8	
				1	5	1	8	
			4	2	3	3	3	
			7	2	3	2	1	
			8	1	3	1	1	1
			9	1	2	1	1	1
			14		1			

**Table 1. Motivation: Reasons Behind Decision to Become Volunteers**

### d) Rewards from Volunteering

Volunteers were asked an open question about what they had found to be ‘most rewarding’ about being a volunteer at Interest Link Borders:

- four had found reward in helping their service user / seeing the service user enjoy themselves;
- three had found reward in the experience as a whole or in having the chance to try something new;
- three had found reward in meeting new people (other volunteers);
- three had found reward in the enjoyment/fun of the activities they were doing;
- two had found reward from new confidence or motivation from volunteering.

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These results show some differences from the reasons that volunteers gave as to why they had got involved in the project e.g. volunteers found enjoyment from meeting people, having fun in activities and gaining confidence that they had not initially been looking for. Volunteers therefore gain more personal rewards than they might initially expect, and even those who volunteer for altruistic reasons will gain benefits for themselves.

*"It's different to what I've done before – something new."*

*"Sometimes the most relaxing part of my day is our visits."*

*"More training than I expected and the social side is fuller than I expected."*

*"Being involved with the service user I appreciate more how well off we are."*

Further evidence for this came when volunteers were asked directly about what they had 'gained personally' from being a volunteer at the project. Even the altruistic volunteers who want to help others, gained personal satisfaction as shown below:

- five had gained satisfaction from helping others/seeing benefits/being appreciated;
- five had gained the chance to meet new people;
- three had gained new experience or awareness;
- one had gained in self-esteem;  
(one unmatched volunteer did not respond)

It is clear therefore that volunteering at Interest Link Borders provides a valuable experience which can give a range of benefits to match a range of motivations.

### **e) Career Development**

Volunteers were asked whether any career development had resulted from their involvement at the project. Only two responded that it had or that it might well do in the future. This differs from befriending projects with a younger age group of volunteers who are often seeking to gain experience as part of their volunteering.

### **f) Difficulties in Volunteering**

Volunteers were asked what they had found most difficult about being a volunteer:

- six (just under half of respondents) reported that there were no difficulties or problems;
- three identified time to attend training or to meet project staff as being problematic because of working shifts;
- two identified difficulties in communicating with service users' parents;
- two identified early difficulties or apprehensions in communicating/relationship building with the service users but noted that these had been resolved;
- one identified a delay in matching (though noted that this was no fault of Interest Link Borders);
- one identified relationship boundaries as a potential area of difficulty.

### **g) Volunteers' Reasons for Leaving**

Although the survey did not cover why volunteers have left the project, the Branch Co-ordinators note that retention rates are very high and that the few volunteers who have left have typically done so because of a change in personal circumstances, and only occasionally because they felt they didn't feel it was the right role for them. The Co-ordinators' experience is that volunteers are usually very open about why they

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are leaving, and there has been little incidence of people leaving for negative scheme-related reasons. The Co-ordinators' experience matches that of other befriending schemes. Older volunteers who are at a more stable stage in terms of family and career tend to stay for longer, while younger volunteers are more likely to experience changes in personal circumstances which might lead them to leave.

### 7. PARENTS / CARERS

This section looks at the parents or carers of the people linked at Interest Link Borders, providing some basic profile information, the reason for their involvement, and the difficulties they have experienced in the course of their involvement.

#### a) Profile of Parents / Carers

The profile of the 11 parents/carers interviewed showed:

- all were women;
- six were professional carers and five were family carers;
- six had one person registered/linked with Interest Link, ranging up to a maximum of two respondents who had six registered/linked.

#### b) Reason for Referral

Parents were asked for the main reason why the person they cared for had been referred to Interest Link Borders:

- Eight said that it provided social support outside of the family/professional staff or the chance for a 1:1 relationship;
- Three said that it offered opportunities for new activities and interests.

#### c) Difficulties in Involvement

All parents and carers were asked what they had found most difficult about being involved at Interest Link Borders. Two thirds (7) of the parents/carers reported no difficulties. Two noted the delay in getting a link or a lack of volunteers, one noted uncertainty about whether a current volunteer would continue, and one professional carer mentioned issues in determining what the role of the volunteer would be.

### 8. SERVICE USERS

#### a) Profile of Service Users

The project's end of year report shows the following gender, age and living situation profile of its service users:

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Registered</b>	<b>Linked</b>
Female	48%	60%
Male	52%	40%

  

<b>Age</b>	<b>Registered</b>	<b>Linked</b>
<30	21%	20%
30-60	60%	83%
60+	19%	12%

#### Nature of Living Situation of Linked Service Users:

Family: 25%

Residential / Supported Accommodation: 75%

## **9. REFERRAL AGENCIES**

This section looks at the referral agencies making use of Interest Link Borders. It provides some background on the agencies, their motivations for referring and looks at the rewards they have gained and the difficulties they have experienced in the course of their involvement.

### **a) Co-ordinators' Experience of Referral Agencies**

Co-ordinators reported generally positive experiences of working with referral agencies. They noted that much of their early work in setting up local offices in each area, involved making contacts and ensuring that the project was known about. This led to good working relationships on the whole, and in many cases to representatives from referral agencies being on local Branch Committees. The only occasional problems had been referrals where people had a greater disability than the project felt that volunteers could cope with.

### **b) Profile of Referral Agencies**

Of the eight referral agencies interviewed:

- four were social work staff, two were linked to voluntary organisations, one was a day centre and one was a residential care establishment;
- four had made more than 10 referrals, three had made 6-10 referrals and one had made 1-5 referrals;
- six had seen less than half of their referrals go on to be matched, while two had seen more than half go on to be matched.

### **c) Reason for Referral**

Referral agencies were asked for the main reason why they had referred people to the befriending project. The results showed very similar answers to the responses from parents and carers:

- six noted the opportunity for service users to gain social support and a 1:1 relationship;
- two noted the opportunity to do new activities they would otherwise not have access to.

*"They have no friends apart from staff. This gives better and more access to community resources."*

*"Social support, positive experiences for clients, improvements in social routine, improved access to experiences and opportunities they would not otherwise have."*

### **d) Difficulties in Involvement**

Three of the responding referral agencies noted that the length of time in waiting to be linked was a problem that led to frustration for clients.

Three more noted problems with volunteers dropping out, or only being available at limited times (e.g. part time during business hours), or making assumptions about the use of premises and equipment.

Two of the responding agencies noted that there were no problems.

*"Clients and relatives have high expectations that volunteers will emerge, but due to age, gender and interest difficulties there are matching delays that cause frustration"*

*"Using volunteers' service cannot be sustained e.g. they drop out and you are back to square one with regards to matching and recruitment."*

**10. EXPERIENCE OF THE PROJECT**

**a) Volunteers' Satisfaction with the Project**

The majority of volunteer respondents are very satisfied with the project with particularly high ratings for the application process, matching and support/supervision. This suggests good relationships between volunteers and staff as these are key areas of interaction and indicates that procedures at the project are good. There is marginally less satisfaction with the training, although this still scores highly.

Volunteers were asked specifically to describe the training provided by Interest Link Borders that prepared them for their role. Nine responses were very positive but four did highlight some problem areas in balancing the right level of training for already experienced volunteers, in receiving training about less able clients which was then not relevant to their subsequent match, and in communication difficulties around setting/cancelling training times.

*"It's very interesting and makes me think. It's worthwhile to share experiences with other trainees. It's well organised."*

*"Through my work I already knew most of it."*

	Satisfied					Don't know
	Not at all	-----			Very	
	1	2	3	4	5	
<b>N =15</b>						
Project as a whole				3	12	
Application and Selection Process				4	10	1
Training			1	5	8	1
Matching				2	11	2
Support and Supervision				4	11	

**Table 2a. Volunteers' Satisfaction with Project**

**b) Parents' / Carers' Satisfaction with the Project**

Results show generally very high levels of satisfaction across the project for parents and carers. The registration process and the project staff score particularly highly. When separated out the results from parent carers are particularly high showing them to be 'very satisfied' with every aspect of the project. Any lower scores are therefore from professional carers with 'ongoing contact from the project' being the area of work with the lowest rating.

	Satisfaction					Don't know
	Not at all	-----			Very	
	1	2	3	4	5	
<b>N =11</b>						
Project as a whole			1	1	9	
Registration process of initial contact				1	9	1
Project staff				1	10	
Project volunteers			1		8	2
Ongoing contact from the project			1	3	7	

**Table 2b. Parents' / Carers' Satisfaction with Project**

Parents and carers were more sure of, and more satisfied with the level of contact they had with project staff *during the course of the link* than the contact they had *before the link started*. All respondents said they felt they could contact project staff if they had questions or concerns, and no respondents felt that there were aspects of the scheme where they wanted more information.

	Satisfaction					Don't know
	Not at all	-----			Very	
	1	2	3	4	5	
<b>N =11</b>						
Before the link started			1	3	5	2
During the course of the link				2	8	1

**Table 2c. Parents' / Carers' Satisfaction with Project Staff Level of Contact**

Whilst the main reasons for referral noted by parents and carers were to provide social support and new activities and interests for service users, other benefits clearly occur as a result of the links. All of the parent carers noted that they received respite or support in some way.

*"It is respite for 4 hours a week for me and my husband, knowing that he (the service user) is safe."*

*"It gives a break to us and we feel confident that he is well looked after"*

For professional carers there were also benefits:

*"The job is easier."*

*"Job satisfaction from seeing clients happy."*

The greatest reward for both parent and professional carers came from knowing there was a new opportunity for service users or directly seeing the enjoyment of service users.

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*“Knowing they have quality time on a 1:1 basis.”*

*“Seeing her happy makes us happy. She is being involved in something.”*

### **c) Referral Agencies’ Satisfaction with the Project**

Referral agencies are generally satisfied with the project with communication, the referral process and the project staff all scoring highly.

When asked what had been most rewarding about their involvement in the befriending project, the majority of referral agencies (6) noted the experiences and opportunities that their clients had received which would otherwise not have happened. The remaining two referral agencies highlighted the positive feedback from satisfied service users as being most rewarding.

*“Seeing clients doing things they’ve not done before, for example going out in the evening.”*

*“They’re given more life skills, experiences and social opportunities.”*

*“A good service that provides a lot of client satisfaction. We appreciate organisers’ linking efforts for our clients.”*

	Satisfaction					Don't know
	Not at all	-----			Very	
N =8	1	2	3	4	5	
Project as a whole			1	4	3	
Communication between Interest Link and your agency				3	5	
Referral process		1		5	2	
Project staff				3	5	
Project volunteers			2	3	2	1

**Table 2d. Referral Agencies’ Satisfaction with Project**

### **d) Service Users’ Experience of the Project**

Service users had a good understanding of what Interest Link was there to do, when they were asked how they would describe it to someone who didn't know what it was.

*“It’s a service for people with learning difficulties.”*

*“It’s to help you do things you couldn’t do otherwise.”*

#### **d) i) Hearing About Interest Link**

Service users recalled initially hearing about Interest Link through support staff or from their parents, and as a result of this they had then met with the Branch Co-ordinator of Interest Link Borders. This meeting had included looking at pictures, while others described completing a registration form which they had needed help with for clearer explanations.

It was generally agreed that the first meeting with a volunteer might also involve the Interest Link Co-ordinator and a member of staff (if a residential or day

## *Unique Opportunities*

care setting) but subsequent meetings involved the service user planning their activities with the volunteer without external involvement.

The names of all of the Branch Co-ordinators represented by the service users present were mentioned at some point and it seemed to be clear to everyone who the Interest Link contact was in their area.

### **d) ii) Frequency of Meeting**

Service users described a range of arrangements with their Interest Link volunteers, meeting either weekly, fortnightly, three weekly or monthly. Service users agreed that they were asked at the outset to state how often they would like to meet with their volunteer. It was noted by the carers present at the Focus Group meeting that service users had the meeting frequency they wanted, although potentially it would be dependent on the volunteers' availability.

The Project Co-ordinator confirms that the average frequency of meeting is fortnightly, while Branch Co-ordinators described the potential variation across a set of links:

*"Some of my best links are monthly, and then I have one where they might play golf three times a week if the weather is good."*

### **d) iii) Waiting to be Linked**

Most service users described waiting for a while to be linked, typically 2 or 3 months although carers attending the Focus Group noted that one person had waited much longer. One service user mentioned that they had been matched *"Straight away"*. Generally service users did not seem troubled by the fact that they had waited.

*"I had to wait for a long time, but I was patient. I understood."*

*"It was worth the wait."*

Service users were asked what they would say to someone who was on the waiting list at the moment.

*"Be patient."*

*"It'll pay off in the end."*

### **d) iv) Problems**

Service users understood that the Branch Co-ordinators were there to provide assistance if there were problems. They agreed that even when there were no problems they saw staff occasionally to chat about how things were going.

*"My co-ordinator was very good the way she told me that my volunteer couldn't see me any more. She made sure she told me at the centre when there were other people around, not when I was on my own at home."*

*"She's there if I need her."*

## **11. EXPERIENCE OF THE RELATIONSHIPS**

### **a) Co-ordinators' Experience of the Relationships**

Co-ordinators stated that they had directly seen the benefits of relationships at Interest Link Borders for service users, volunteers and parents and carers.

#### **a) i) Service Users**

Co-ordinators had seen the following benefits for service users:

- growth in confidence;
- had the chance to make choices;
- gained social contact that is specific to them and is 1:1;
- undertaken activities at weekends;
- had access to safe contact;
- acquired new skills e.g. communication and social, evening class;
- had something to look forward to in the week;
- been more motivated;
- taken part in community activities (joined a club);
- gained independence to try activities on their own;
- pursued hobbies;
- overcome problems e.g. with accessing transport;
- shared an interest / activity with another person;
- gone where everyone else has gone / been able to join in;
- tried new activities / new experiences.

The project often uses the term 'improving people's quality of life' and the list above provides some of the detail of what this can mean for people.

#### **a) ii) Volunteers**

Co-ordinators had seen the following benefits for volunteers:

- gained a worthwhile activity in their spare time;
- gained a purpose;
- gained experience of learning disabilities;
- helped to break down barriers in the community;
- enjoyed the social side of things;
- increased opportunities for social interaction;
- gained experience for career development purposes;
- changed career direction;
- built up self esteem and confidence;
- overcome loneliness.

#### **a) iii) Parents / Carers**

Co-ordinators had seen the following benefits for parents and carers:

- respite;
- changes in the group dynamics for people in supported accommodation if one person is out with their volunteer;
- response to low staffing ratios which can not provide 1:1 external activities.

**b) Volunteers' Experience of the Relationship**

The majority of volunteers have had a good or very good experience and three quarters of volunteers believe that the service users have had a very good experience within their link.

	Quality of Experience					Don't know
	Very Bad	-----			Very Good	
	1	2	3	4	5	
<b>N =14</b> (1 of 15 discounted as N/A)						
For you (the volunteer)				3	10	1
For the service user				2	10	2

**Table 3a. The Links – A Good or a Bad Experience? – The Volunteers' View**

**c) Changes Observed in the Service Users by Volunteers**

11 of the 15 volunteers interviewed had observed some change in the person they met with in the course of their link. Only one volunteer had seen no change at all, while the remaining three didn't know.

The 'no' responses should not be viewed as failing or as non-achievement. It will be difficult for each group to comment fully in every category, for example previous studies<sup>3</sup> indicate that parents are more likely to be able to comment on family relationships. In link relationships where change has not been observed, the service user is still getting the chance of an additional activity and social opportunity; what Interest Link Borders would call 'improved quality of life'.

19 out of a total of 26 'don't know' comments were from volunteers who were in links which had been going for less than 6 months. As with many other befriending projects it seems that volunteers at Interest Link are more able to comment on the impact of their relationship given a year or more of shared activity. Other 'don't know's' were expressed by those who felt that they had no baseline to measure against and comment on e.g. observation of family relationships.

	Yes	No	Don't Know	
<b>N =14</b> (1 of 15 discounted as N/A)				
In general	4	4	6	
To their self confidence	8	1	5	
To their feelings of self worth / self esteem	9	1	4	
To their family relationships	4	2	7	(1 N/A no family)
To their involvement in the community	6	4	4	

**Table 3b. Positive Changes in the Service User Observed by the Volunteer**

**d) Changes Observed in Service Users by Parents / Carers**

Parents and carers have particularly observed positive changes in self-confidence and feelings of self-worth/self esteem during the time that the service users have been linked with volunteers. Two parents/carers observed positive changes in every category. Only one parent/carer had observed no change and one was unsure in every category.

Compared with the volunteers, parents/carers are much clearer about positive changes with very few 'don't know' answers.

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This is important information to pass on to volunteers, particularly for those who are motivated by the satisfaction of making a difference in people's lives.

<b>N =11</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
In general	7	3	1
To their self confidence	8	2	1
To their feelings of self worth / self esteem	7	3	1
To their family relationships	2	3	6
To their involvement in the community	5	4	2

**Table 3c. Positive Changes in the Service User Observed by Parents/Carers**

*"They are far calmer and less anxious. They have a purpose to their week."*

*"He has something to speak to other people about and that is worthwhile."*

*"They see different places and get out of the house. They look forward to the visit and there is more motivation and purpose."*

### **e) Changes Experienced by Service Users**

Service users referred to some of the changes they experienced through Interest Link in a discussion on what they liked about their volunteer.

Some mentioned the confidence that being with a volunteer gave them, either to go to new places or to try some thing new, for assistance with mobility problems or for encouragement.

*"My volunteer came with me to Weight Watchers which I found difficult to go to on my own."*

*"They help me to go out at night."*

*"It means you can do things without your parents or carers".*

*"They help me to go to places I can't go to on my own"*

For many it appeared that having a positive relationship with their volunteer and doing everyday activities was the main benefit that Interest Link brought them. Service users described the type of activity they did with their volunteer, or the college course they undertook with their buddy. The tremendous range of activities undertaken regularly included birdwatching, walking, shopping, going for coffee, playing dominoes, taking local photos, walking the dog, going out for a meal or a drink, undertaking computing, painting, creative writing, drawing, sewing and make-up courses at local college. In addition some service users described special events such as going to the pantomime or to the Edinburgh Tattoo.

*"It's important that you get on with your volunteer. I get on with mine like a house on fire."*

Others recalled being remembered at birthdays or at Christmas, and described volunteers as being kind and helpful.

## Unique Opportunities

*“She’s really kind. She’s been awffy good to me”.*

### f) Changes Observed in Service Users by Referral Agencies

Referral agencies also reported positive changes for the people they have referred to Interest Link Borders with changes being observed particularly in service users’ involvement in the community, and their self-confidence and self-worth.

	Yes	No	Don’t Know
<b>N =8</b> *2 answers N/A			
In general	4	1	3
To their self confidence	5	1	2
To their feelings of worth / self esteem	5	1	2
To their family relationships*	2	1	3
To their involvement in the community	7	0	1

**Table 3d. Positive Changes in Service Users Observed by Referral Agencies**

## **12. PROJECT DEVELOPMENTS**

This section looks at other similar services in the Borders and at what those connected with the project saw as potential areas of development.

### **a) Unique Nature of the Project**

Volunteers, parents and carers and referral agencies were unanimous in their response when asked what service would be used if Interest Link Borders did not exist. They all concluded that there was no equivalent.

*“Not any that I know of and I’ve looked actively.”*

*“There wouldn’t be anyone for her at the weekends. It would be a big loss to her and us.”*

*“Would struggle a bit. 1:1 attention is exclusive to Interest Link Borders.”*

*“Virtually nil. Outreach service but it is expensive and my department can’t afford it.”*

*“Don’t know of any alternative.”*

### **b) Potential Developments**

#### **b) i) Volunteers’ Views on Project Developments**

There were no specific suggestions from volunteers when asked about potential project developments, just an endorsement once again that the project in its current form is a good experience for volunteers.

*“A good organisation to work for. Lots of support.”*

*“Very worthwhile experience for me”*

*“An admirable service and idea.”*

#### **b) ii) Parents’ / Carers’ Views on Project Developments**

Parents and carers reaffirmed that they were happy with the service but noted that it would be good if it could be expanded. Individual suggestions on this included more support for *“those with severe learning disabilities,”* the option to run group activities for volunteers and service users as people might *“feel more involved this way”*, or *“more classes for clients like the Buddy Scheme.”*

Generally the tone of answers from parents and carers was that Interest Link Borders should:

*“...continue and grow and benefit more people.”*

#### **b) iii) Referral Agencies’ Views on Project Developments**

Most of the referral agencies’ responses when asked what developments they would like to see, revolved around shortening the waiting time, increasing the number of volunteers available and raising the profile of the project.

*“More publicity and awareness raising especially to get more volunteers”*

*“More males as matches are on a same-sex basis”*

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*“The new Buddy Scheme for evening classes. I would like to see more of this. 60 registered clients and 15 volunteers is pointless. Why register so many with so few volunteers?”*

*“More volunteers”*

### **b) iv) Committee Members’ Views on Project Developments**

One committee member was keen to stress that it is not the fault of the project that it can't meet demand. The project is resourced to take on a certain level of work and anything beyond that is unmet need that the project can't be held accountable for. Committee members recognised that more resources would be needed to better respond to demand in order to sustain the quality that had been established. It was noted that there may be geographical areas which currently have a low rate of uptake and that these could be the focus of future development.

Committee members believed that future developments and an increased opportunity for resources might link well with a recent major review of local authority day services, given the potential for change from the current model. As Interest Link Borders offers a well-organised model of alternative means of support, it could be delivering on the type of support that Borders Council wants to develop more of.

*“It's as good a time as it's ever been.”*

*“If they are looking for flexibility, choice and independence in the community then that is what we offer.”*

There was also comment on the fact that Interest Link Borders had broadened its role in recent months with its awareness-raising work. One committee member commented that the project could develop this broader role by seeking to be more influential in how things are managed e.g. involvement in planning local services and developments.

Another suggestion involved a broadening of what the link relationships themselves achieved, for example looking at the potential to make citizenship more real for people with learning disabilities by giving them encouragement to have an active role in local issues. It was suggested that this might give more of a community feel to the friendships and might build people's skills out of the friendships that they have.

*“Interest Link Borders shouldn't speak for people but should let people speak for themselves.”*

Other development possibilities included looking for other options to work collaboratively at local level following the success of the Buddies project.

### **b) v) Service Users’ Views on Project Developments**

Service users' responses on the potential for project developments included continuing with the Buddy Scheme with the possibility of developing it to include other establishments or interest groups, and looking at the potential for whole day trips and holidays/short breaks.

### **13. CONCLUSIONS**

Interest Link Borders aims to provide 1:1 relationships which support adults with learning disabilities to pursue activities and interests. The project has expanded rapidly in the last two years to offer its service over a much wider geographical area and to support over 100 people with learning disabilities through long term links and buddy placements.

The volunteers at Interest Link are predominantly female, nearly two thirds are aged over 45 and only 6% are under 30. They are motivated to volunteer by a desire to do something worthwhile in the community, and to do something positive with their spare time. This differs from other befriending projects where there are more younger volunteers involved and where gaining experience features more commonly as being important. The age range of volunteers does not reflect that of the service users (e.g. 45% of linked service users are aged over 45 as opposed to 63% of volunteers. 20% of linked service users are under 30 as opposed to 6% of volunteers).

In addition there are substantially lower numbers of male volunteers (28%) compared to the number of male service users referred (52%). Because the organisation generally operates a same gender linking policy, men wait longer to be matched.

The scheme has attracted a high proportion of volunteers who have not volunteered before in their local community, and it reports a very good record of retaining volunteers.

People with learning disabilities are referred for reasons which match the project's aim, namely in order to increase their opportunities for 1:1 support or to have access to activities and interests. Whilst there are additional benefits e.g. parents gaining respite, these are the main reason for users being referred to the project, which suggests that it is being referred to appropriately.

Volunteers report high levels of satisfaction with the project, notably in the support provided for them by project staff. Referral agencies are also satisfied with the scheme, as are the parents and carers. Family carers have particularly high rates of satisfaction with the project. Professional carers also rate the project highly, with 'ongoing contact with the project' the only area of work that has slightly lower satisfaction ratings.

Volunteers report having a good experience from their links and believe that the adults with whom they are matched are also having a good experience.

Volunteers have observed a range of positive changes for the service users, particularly in their self-confidence and feelings of self-worth. Volunteers who have been involved for a longer time were able to identify more changes for the service user they are matched with.

Parents, carers and referring agencies also report positive changes for the people supported primarily in the areas of self-confidence and self-worth. The service users themselves speak very positively of their links with volunteers and the fact that these relationships enable them to undertake activities which they might not otherwise do.

The main problem mentioned by a number of parties is the delay in waiting to be linked. Whilst service users recall that they were patient while waiting to be linked, this delay is noted as a problem by some referral agencies and parents and carers. As the project places value on relationships being reasonably long term, this problem

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will remain for the project without significant volunteer recruitment as they can expect 'throughput' to be slow. The already substantial waiting list is an inevitable result of this, although the project makes efforts to inform and include those on a waiting list as much as it can.

Volunteers gain satisfaction from seeing service users enjoying their activities. In addition volunteers have themselves gained additional social benefits, and have enjoyed themselves and in a limited number of cases have gained experience which they believe has or may assist with their career development. Few volunteers have experienced difficulties in their links.

The project is seen by all parties as unique in the Borders and alternative forms of support were understood not to be available or were considered to be over-stretched. Most groups interviewed would like to see more adults with learning disabilities supported by the project.

The project is seen by management and staff as being strategically minded, creative and willing to try new ideas. The example used by many is the Buddy Project. The project is providing a service that is highly valued by those it seeks to support, but is organisationally very well-connected and makes every effort to link with key players in the wider learning disabilities field in the Borders. This includes having a very high representation of related agencies on its management committees which has led to the profile of the organisation being increased.

Despite working individually in local areas, Branch Co-ordinators generally feel very well supported both by the structure of Branch Committees and by the Project Co-ordinator. The only suggestion for altering this was in having additional options for external supervision as a means of personal development and the chance to meet or communicate more frequently with peers in the staff team.

Interest Link has a successful track record of raising external project funding from trusts. However, as the plan for 2004-2007 notes, "principal reliance on funding from such sources does not marry well with the need to ensure long-term continuity of the established core service". This is also the experience of the few befriending projects which have grown in size in the way that Interest Link has, and the next stage of development needs to be considered very carefully to ensure that the organisation balances the scale of service it wishes to provide with a sustainable size.

The project is extremely well-informed and well-connected to place itself in line for funding through the Council, as its activities link fit with the trend towards more community-based day activities. There will be clear opportunities for the project to link with the current review of day service provision.

## **14. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The project is doing an excellent job at providing a valuable service for people with learning disabilities. It has also positioned itself well and worked hard at developing its profile and securing support and should strive to maintain this strong position.

As Interest Link Borders considers how to structure itself for the next period of time (2004-2007) it should consider the value of bringing local committees together for a 'visioning day', ensuring that all are informed and 'on board' for the next stage of the project. This day should be informed by statistical analysis including profiles of service users and volunteers, levels of demand, and demand from those outwith current project criteria.

As it plans its development, the main areas that Interest Link Borders must explore are:

- **The potential demand from its constituency:** there is a gender and age mismatch between the service users referred and the project's volunteers, and the demand for support is much larger than current resources can cope with and could continue to grow;
- **The maximum number of links that a staff member can manage;** staff are already managing numbers that are close to good practice recommendations, therefore the project should determine what its limits should be in order not to overstretch resources and affect the quality of service;
- **The funding options that are available;** there are a finite number of times that the same larger trusts will support the project and even with local authority support the project should proceed with further development with caution in order to remain at a sustainable level;

Recommendations relating to these areas of work are detailed overleaf. In addition there are other recommendations for exploring current practice based on conclusions from the surveys undertaken or from some of the weaknesses in the project identified by staff and committee members.

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### **a) Increasing the Scale of the Project**

- i) Consider carefully the maximum caseloads of links relating to current staff hours and to potentially increased staff hours (with reference to the Code of Practice<sup>1</sup> and the experience of other befriending projects), relating these to the level of good practice the project wishes to aim for (training, supervision etc.);
- ii) Base the scale of the project for the next 3 years and the targets mentioned in any funding proposals on i);
- iii) Contact other similarly sized befriending projects e.g. COVEY, bfriends, re their recent experience and the difficulties and potential methods in sustaining larger befriending projects;

### **b) Project Developments / Funding Packages**

- i) Consider the potential for packaging the increased recruitment of younger volunteers and of more men as areas of development which may attract funding, and which might be viewed as innovative across the befriending field;
- ii) Consider the opportunity to package support options for service users who are on waiting lists as a funding development addressing unmet need;
- iii) Explore options for respite care funding recognising that the project has an impact on the quality of life of carers (refer to experience of befriending projects which have been successful in this);
- iv) Consider geographical areas not currently reached by the project and the opportunity to package these as a project development for funders;
- v) Consider opportunities to develop specific work with male service users to address the imbalance between registered users and male volunteers and package these as a project development for funders;
- vi) Consider fundamental changes to how fundraising is undertaken at the project to avoid over-reliance on trust funds e.g. consider the feasibility of employing fundraisers (refer to befriending projects that have used these resources), of developing 'friends of' schemes, of seeking out individual donors, and of undertaking large scale fundraising events;
- vii) Consider training for the Project Co-ordinator to assist in broadening his fundraising experience beyond trusts;
- viii) Package anonymised evidence gathered in reviews on the difference that befriending has made in people's lives for use in funding applications;
- ix) Ensure that any request for funding to Borders Council shows how much charitable funding has been brought into the area for this work to date;
- x) Funding proposals should stress the management structure as being innovative and responding to geographical challenges as well as involving carers and users;
- xi) Discuss with the Scottish Executive about their interest in supporting local work of

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national significance and explore the potential for Interest Link to be supported as an example of a replicable project;

- xii) Quantify the potential demand from those outwith the current service criteria who have tried to access the project; people with physical disabilities, people with mental health problems, people with severe learning disabilities, and use this information in Committee 'visioning' day;

### **c) Staff Support and Communication**

- i) Undertake basic training needs analysis for staff and build into programme for next three years and fundraise for this as a specific item;
- ii) Explore potential value of additional support / personal development for staff e.g. through external supervision;
- iii) Review frequency of staff meetings and consider the addition of occasional case study / procedure review meetings by Teleconference using Community Network;

### **d) Volunteer Recruitment**

- i) Consider introduction of specific campaigns/approaches to increase numbers of male volunteers (and explore fundraising potential of this development);
- ii) Consider introduction of specific campaigns/approaches to increase numbers of younger (<age 30) volunteers (and explore fundraising potential of this);

### **e) Waiting List Management**

- i) Review current approach to informing and including service users on the waiting list to ensure that this area of work is being handled as sensitively as possible;
- ii) Explore approaches adopted by other befriending projects to waiting lists;

### **f) Evaluation**

- i) Evaluate Buddies Scheme prior to discussing developments for the future. Review the responses of volunteers, service users and colleges to the first year of work;
- ii) Explore options from Borders Council for financial support to assist in above evaluation;

### **g) Project Procedures**

- i) Consider review of the current same-gender matching policy in order to make the provision of service more even for males and females;
- i) Review current practice in maintaining contact with professional carers once links are established to ensure good communication is maximised;
- iii) Review how best to balance the need to provide training for all volunteers with the mixed experience and abilities that a volunteer group will present with;
- iv) Review procedures of gaining feedback from service users on links;

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- v) Review procedures for risk assessments;
- vi) Explore opportunity of reviewing a different project procedure in two-monthly teleconferences involving staff team;
- vii) Review method of providing training volunteers with different levels of experience e.g. fast track training for more experienced volunteers;
- viii) Review service user registration forms to ensure they are at an appropriate level;

### **h) Strategic Placement**

- i) Maintain current contacts with Borders Council and other key players in the learning disabilities field in order to be best placed for gaining support for future developments;
- ii) Improve contacts with Scottish Executive highlighting that Interest Link is providing an innovative service which could provide an example for other local authorities;
- iii) Ensure that Borders Council is aware of the role it could play in supporting a nationally innovative project;

### **i) Nature of Relationships**

- i) Explore opportunities/practicalities for day activities as suggested by service users;
- ii) Explore opportunities for weekend breaks / holidays as suggested by service users gathering information from Alternative Scheme for Holiday Aspirations (ASHA) (Edinburgh);

## **Appendix A – Methodology**

The Evaluation was undertaken using the following methods:

- i) Meeting and telephone discussion with Project Co-ordinator;
- ii) Telephone discussion with two Committee members;
- iii) Telephone Surveys with 15 volunteers involved in the project for a varied length of time. Volunteers were called by the project and agreed to take part before the survey took place;
- iv) Telephone Surveys with 11 parents/carers including family and professional Carers. Parents and carers were called by the project and agreed to take part before the survey took place;
- v) Telephone Surveys with 8 Referral Agencies (a range of agencies reflecting those that regularly refer including social work and voluntary organisations); Referral agencies were called by the project and agreed to take part before the survey took place. Two of those interviewed are involved in Interest Link Borders Branch Committees;
- vi) A Focus Group was held with 14 service users, co-ordinated by People First. The meeting involved 14 service users. A mix of men (3) and women (11) from predominantly from Galashiels and Peebles but with representatives from Duns, Greenlaw and Melrose as well. The meeting was organised and co-ordinated by People First and by Anne Suckling of People First who is also the Convenor of Interest Link. An open invitation was extended to service users. There were two professional carers present as well. The meeting was structured as a discussion around a basic set of questions and involved some round-the-table answers from all participants and some open question and answer discussion.

Copies of the surveys used are available on request .

## **Appendix B**

### **References**

1. Working Together to Promote Good Practice in Befriending – Befriending Network (Scotland) Ltd. 1999
2. Providing Support, Reducing Exclusion; The Extent, Nature and Value of Volunteer Befriending in Northern Ireland, Hollway and Mawhinney, 2002.
3. Changing Lives – Shetland Befriending Scheme Evaluation

*Unique Opportunities*

**Appendix C**

<b>RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS</b>	<b>EXAMPLE OF ACTION</b>	<b>OUTCOME</b>
<b>Organisational Structure</b>		
Involve users more actively in governance	Users involved on management committee and some branch committees	DONE
Additional Admin for Co-ordinator	Introduced in 1999.	DONE
<b>Communication / Internal</b>		
Develop newsletter for service users		DONE
Maintain mixed approaches to advertising	See next section / advertising	DONE
Develop training calendar of training / social events for volunteers		DONE
Explore use of Teleconferencing for committee/volunteers	Not deemed necessary for committee given current cycle of meetings Not deemed necessary for volunteers Remains an option for staff to supplement face to face meetings	
Use service user's words (with permission) in promotional literature	2 press articles using service user quotes. Forthcoming training/promotional video will use service user quotes	DONE
Use photographs of service users	Photographs used in articles and displays. Video will include service users	DONE

*Unique Opportunities*

<b>RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS</b>	<b>EXAMPLE OF ACTION</b>	
Vary methods of communication e.g. radio, newspapers	<p>Public launch parties for all branches</p> <p>Radio Borders advertising campaign,</p> <p>4 radio features, 10-15 press articles, 6 press adverts.</p> <p>Video will hopefully be shown on Community Channel.</p> <p>Buddies publicity on Borders College flyer to all Borders homes.</p> <p>Awareness-raising/ volunteer recruitment leaflet currently being distributed to all Borders homes over the next year.</p> <p>Interest Link tent/stall at Borders Union Show 2003: places provided for 4 other learning disabilities organisations, attracted 250 people over 2 days.</p> <p>Displays in public places and events, e.g. Heriot-Watt Freshers Fair, Borders College, Jobs Fairs, Local Hospital, libraries</p> <p>Presentations to local groups such as WRI, churches.</p> <p>Publicity from winning New Ways Award 2003 and gaining IIP standard</p> <p>Web site with information, news, volunteer opportunities</p> <p>Fundraising events: coffee-mornings, slide shows</p> <p>Workshops run at learning disabilities events: e.g. day services review, ENABLE roadshow</p>	DONE
<b>Procedures</b>		
Maintain procedures for recruiting service users and volunteers		DONE
Develop informal contract / agreement for links	Volunteer agreement introduced	DONE
Utilise others' training events and materials	<p>Training from BNS, VDS, Borders Learning Disabilities Team, Council Social Work, Lothian &amp; Borders Voluntary Training Forum, Health &amp; Safety Executive, Epilepsy Society, Scottish Consortium of Learning Disability, ENABLE</p>	DONE

*Unique Opportunities*

<b>RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS</b>	<b>EXAMPLE OF ACTION</b>	
<b>Communication / External</b>		
Invite key officers in SWD to social events	Each branch gave initial presentations to local Social Work officers and invited officers to launch parties. All committees have Social work representatives.	DONE
Educate Social Work in Interest Link		DONE
Involve staff from supported accommodation if developing services in other areas		DONE
<b>Funding</b>		
Consider Council funding for Borders-wide development		DONE
Package funding items (training events, petrol fund)	Specific small grants for: ICT: Camelot Foundation £4,168 Staff training: Agnes Hunter Trust £2,000 Staff travel: 4 trusts & Scottish Community Foundation £5,100 Buddies: Awards for All £4,500, Scottish Community Foundation £3,000, Scottish Borders Council £5,000 UVAF: Volunteer events £1,000	DONE
<b>Development</b>		
Maintain project's own agenda / don't get drawn towards others agendas		DONE
Local multiplication of model is best method of expansion		DONE