



Learning Disabilities Befriending

Annual Report 2018-19



Convenor's Report

We have had another good year, in which our in-school befriending groups became established, we were runners-up in the National Youth Work Awards and presented our work at Holyrood.

We now have 6 in-school groups operating in secondary and primary schools in Hawick, Selkirk, Duns and Kelso during lunchtime breaks. They are primarily designed to reach children with learning disabilities who cannot access our community groups or 1:1 links because of health, behavioural, family or personal care issues. However they have also had an impact on wider social inclusion in the schools involved: friendships formed within the groups become friendships in the wider school environment and then the outside community (for example volunteers asking members to birthday parties). Carers, who are aware of how isolated their children can be at school, are happier knowing this has been addressed.

We were shortlisted in the Diversity & Equality category at the National Youth Work Awards in March 2019. This raised our profile among youth services nationally and there was interest in the way our service model could be used by generic youth services to reach those with learning disabilities and autism. Earlier in the year there was another profile-raising opportunity when a member & volunteer made a video presentation as part of Befriending Networks' Holyrood Reception.

As always, we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to our funders and the faith they have shown in us: our work would be impossible without them.

I would also like to give a personal note of thanks to all the people who have contributed their time and effort to making Interest Link so successful over the past year: the volunteers, staff and committee members who give Interest Link its unique quality..

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kenneth Wood', written in a cursive style.

Kenneth Wood, Convenor

Our Aims & Activities

- Many children, young people and adults with learning disabilities are socially isolated, with few opportunities and low levels of confidence, wellbeing and social skills. We address this through volunteer befriending for our 300 members: creating real and equal friendships that also provide respite for family carers from their arduous role.
- Friendships are essential for human happiness and our volunteers are often the only people in member's lives purely out of choice. This has an enormous impact on wellbeing and self-esteem, and carers can enjoy the time for themselves because they know the person they care for is having fun with friends in a safe environment.
- We have 200 volunteers of all ages and from all walks of life, including around 70 recruited from schools and Borders College. The significant and visible impact they make on the people they befriend makes it a very rewarding role and we do everything we can to prepare and support volunteers to make their role sustainable.
- We were founded in 1990, and have 4 local Branches (Berwickshire, Central Borders, Roxburgh and Tweeddale) covering the Scottish Borders and working with 320 members. Each project has a paid Co-ordinator and Assistant, and our Board and Branch Committees comprise people with learning disabilities, carers, volunteers and representatives of third sector care providers & statutory services.
- There is no time limit on the friendships, and we aim to provide lifelong support that will particularly help at times of transition. Our projects are free of charge apart from contributions to travel and activity costs.
- We work closely with schools, the local authority Learning Disabilities Team and adult care providers, but referrals can come from any source and the only criteria is learning disabilities.

1:1 links

- Members are matched with volunteers who share their interests, are of a similar age and can meet them regularly.
- Activities take place in the community, for example going to the cinema, local events, walks, shopping, coffee, arts & crafts, golf, swimming or football. Activities usually last around 3 hours and can be weekly, fortnightly or monthly.
- We aim to link children and young people with our young volunteers, who are mostly in the 15-18 age range, and feel this is far more natural than using adult volunteers.
- 1:1 links have a very special quality because the volunteer is often the only person in the member's life who is there purely out of choice. Relationships often last 5 or more years.

Befriending Groups

- We currently run 22 befriending groups, ranging in size from 6 to 16 people, usually with equal numbers of members and volunteers. Most meet every

fortnight in the evening, but the Caledonian and Coldstream groups meet monthly.

- One group is intergenerational, but the others cater for specific ages: children’s groups for 8-16 year olds have an emphasis on play, the young people’s groups for 16-25 year olds involve more personal development, and our adult groups use arts, crafts, cooking and drama to build close bonds and friendships.
- The aim is for the groups to be as much like mainstream youth and adult social groups as possible. They do the same range of activities (including overnight trips), and ideally the distinction between those with learning disabilities and volunteers get forgotten as relationships develop.

Service Delivery

	At 01/04/2018	New Links	Ended Links	At 31/03/2019	Total 2018-19
Adults					
1:1	52	8	13	47	60
Groups	42	8	1	49	50
Children and Young People					
1:1	24	15	13	26	39
Groups	72	26	17	81	98
Total	190	57	44	203	247

Note: the total number of members supported was 201 (46 members were involved in more than one link).

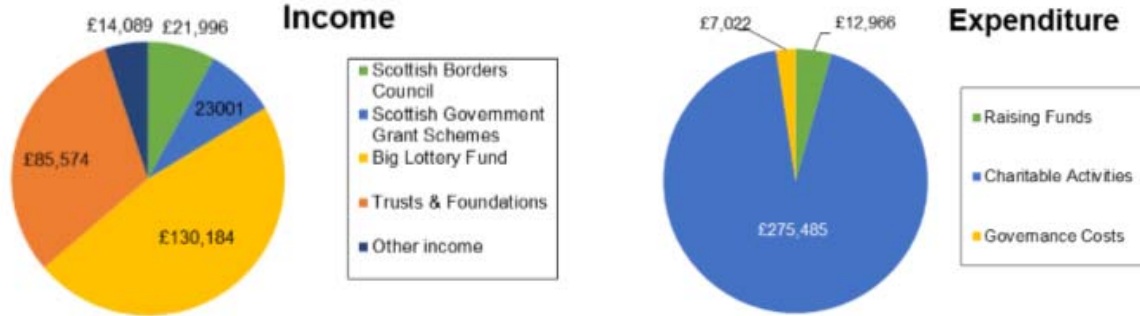


**The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service**

The MBE for volunteer groups

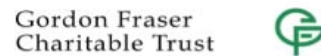
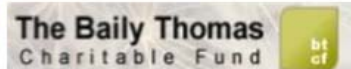


Finance 2018-19

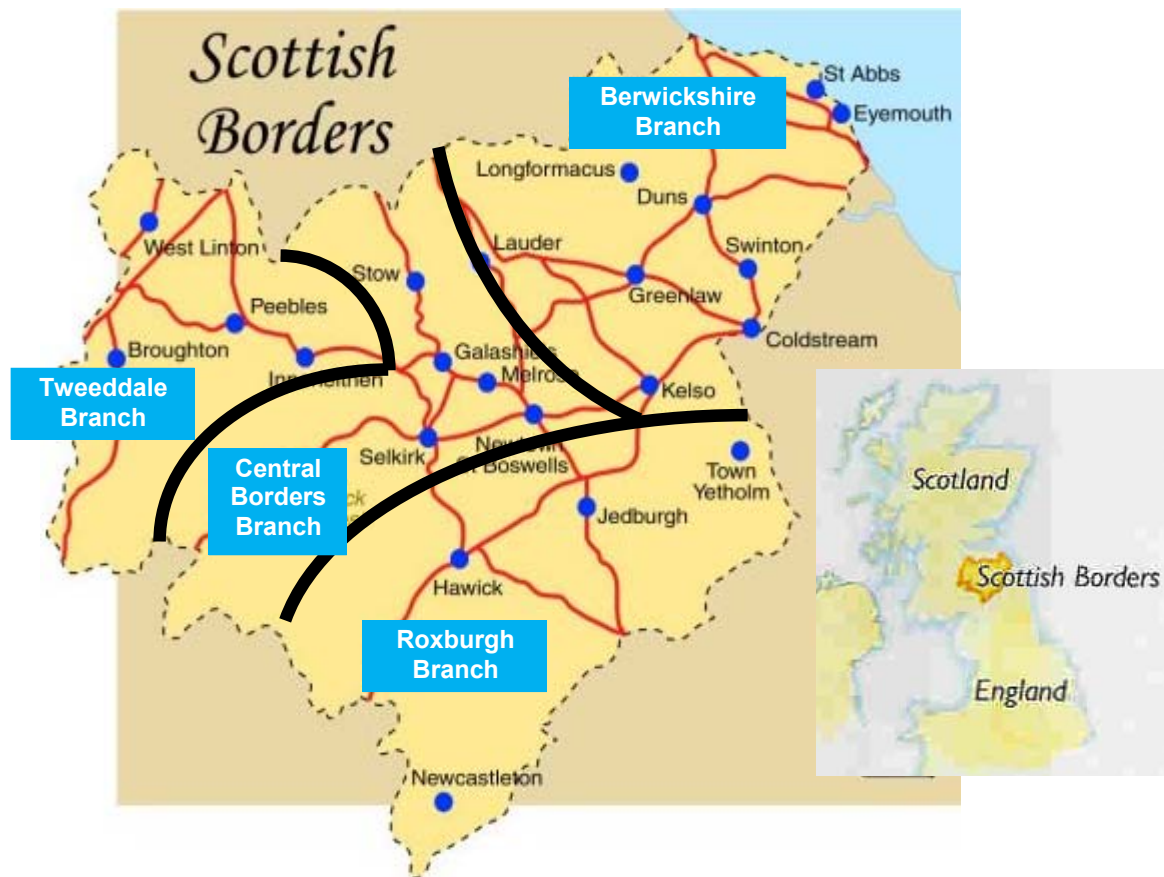


These figures have been collated from the independently examined accounts of Interest Link Borders (A charitable company limited by guarantee) which are available at www.interestlink.org.uk. The collation of these pie-charts has not been the subject of an independent examination.

With thanks to our Funders in 2018-19:



Interest Link Branches



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