



Learning Disabilities Befriending

Annual Report 2019-20



Convenor's Report

As we all know 2020 has been a challenging and unusual year for everyone in all aspects of life. The lockdown introduced a number of restrictions to ensure personal safety, however this itself has introduced frustrations and feelings of isolation.

The Board of Interest Link Borders would like to acknowledge and thank all the great efforts of our members, carers, volunteers and staff for all their great support and engagement during this turbulent time. We believe that this epitomises what Interest Link Borders stands for.

During these uncertain times, the speed with which the service was adapted to meet the changing requirements laid out by the government is to everyone's credit. Interest Link Borders appreciated the importance of the service that it provides and the benefits that this brings to all, especially in the current climate. The Board acknowledge and applaud all the work that has gone into planning, risk assessing, communicating and rolling out such a variation of these services online and virtually.

Obviously we all hope that things return to a near normal environment sooner rather than later. The Board are impressed with the attention to detail that is being taken into account to address the lifting of restrictions and draft route mapping for the reintroduction for the physical gatherings that Interest Link Borders provides across the Scottish Borders.

Thank you to everyone from the Board of Interest Link Borders for their great work, patience, understanding and support during this time. Take care and stay safe.

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.

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 longterm 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 the presence of learning disabilities.

1:1 links

- Members are matched with volunteers who share their interests, are often 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.

Befriending Groups

- Our 22 befriending groups range in size from 6 to 16 people, usually with equal numbers of members and volunteers and meeting every fortnight in the evening.
- 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.

Adaptations in response to COVID-19

We stopped face-to-face meetings in mid-March and by mid-April had a distance befriending service up and running. This varied slightly from Branch to Branch and included:

- Telephone/video befriending for 1:1 links and group members.
- Private Facebook pages and WhatsApp groups.
- Zoom bingo, quiz nights and exercise classes.
- Hard copy newsletters with members' and volunteers' news, stories, messages, jokes & photos.
- Art & craft projects, quizzes, seed packs and other activities to do at home.

It would be very difficult for our members to build up new friendships remotely without face-to-face contact. However it is clear from our experiences during lockdown that the momentum built up behind existing friendships means they can thrive in a distance befriending environment. As we start to transition back to face-to-face delivery we are likely to retain some of the distance service so that people can be in contact with friends more often and in a variety of ways.

Service Delivery

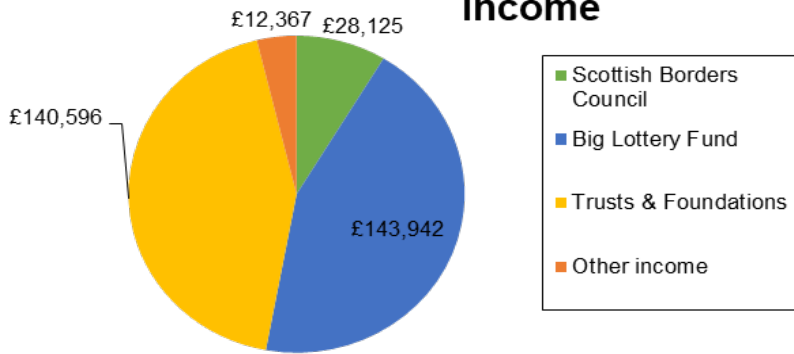
Links Analysis	At 1/4/2019	New Links	Ended Links	At 31/3/2020	Total 2019-20
1:1	73	12	17	68	85
Groups	130	26	18	138	156
Total	203	42	39	206	241
Volunteers		Joined	Left		
	200	27	25	202	227

Note: the total number of members supported was 203 (38 members were involved in more than one group or 1:1 link).

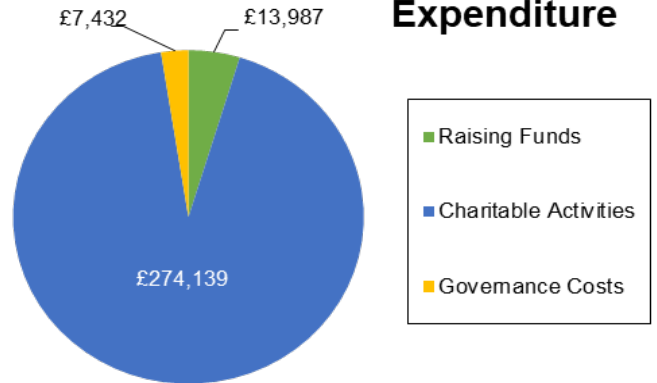


Finance 2019-20

Income



Expenditure

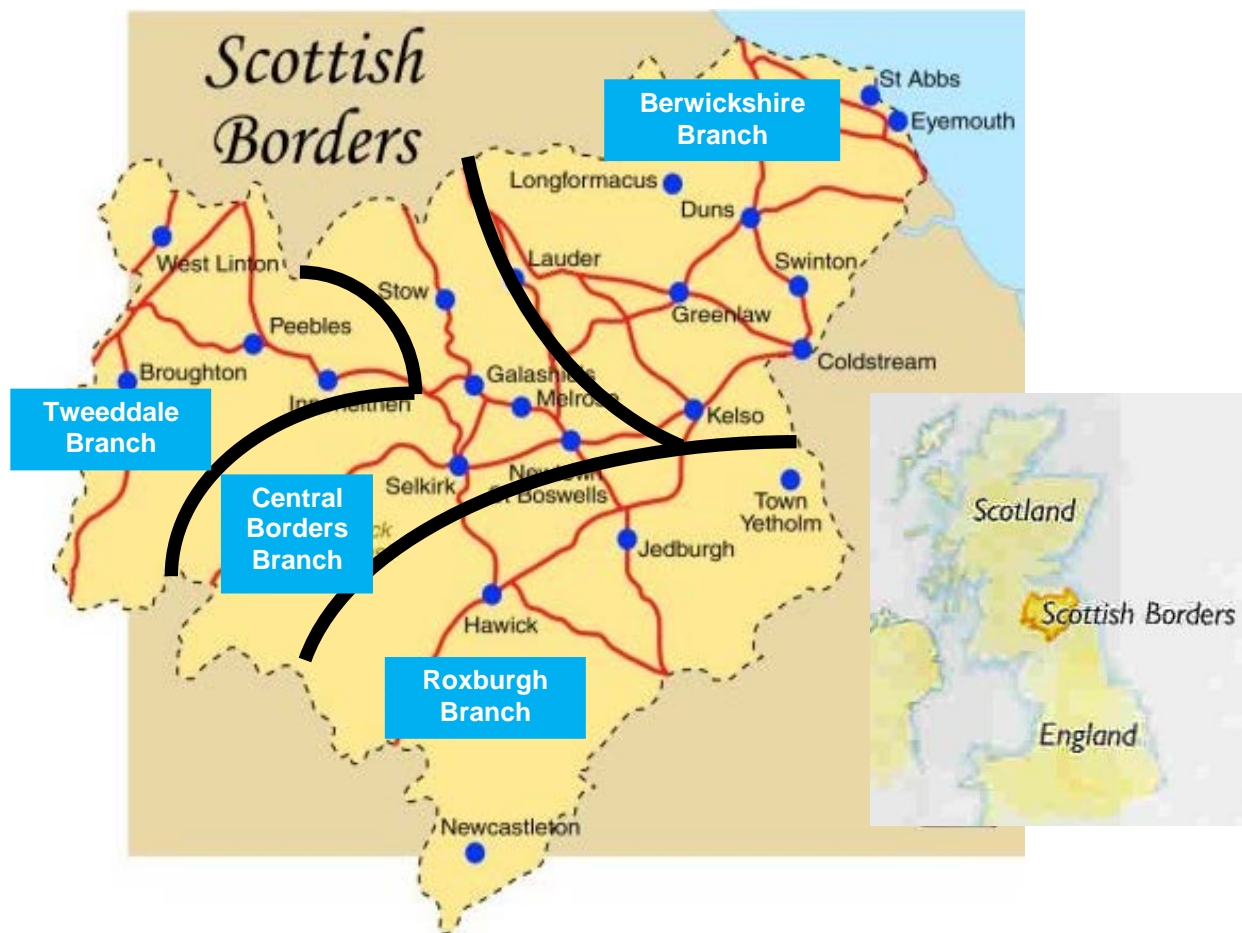


These figures have been collated from the independently examined accounts of Interest Link Borders (A charitable company limited by guarantee) which are available at www.interestlink.org.uk. The collation of these pie-charts has not been the subject of an independent examination.

With thanks to our Funders in 2019-20:



Interest Link Branches



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