

## Interest Link Borders September 2020 Evaluation & Consultation Results

50 members with learning disabilities, 55 carers and 65 volunteers were surveyed via online & paper questionnaires, telephone calls and workshops.

Outcomes Achieved							
Impact on Members	More Friends	Greater Happiness	Improved Confidence	Increased Self-esteem	Better Social Skills	Felt no outcomes	Felt all outcomes
Reported by Themselves	98%	95%	95%	98%	88%	0%	86%
Reported by Carers	96%	96%	90%	94%	87%	2%	84%
Reported by Volunteers	98%	98%	98%	98%	96%	2%	96%
	Life Outside Caring		Helped Sustain Caring Role		Greater Wellbeing		
Impact on Carers	79%		88%		85%	9%	77%
	Increased Learning Disabilities Awareness		More confidence with people with learning disabilities				
Impact on Volunteers	95%		90%			3%	93%

### Other survey statistics:

- 100% of members and 98% of carers said they still needed our service.
- 90% of Members, 70% of carers and 99% of volunteers said the Coronavirus restrictions had increased the need for the service..
- 98% said they had been happy with our physical face-to-face service delivered before COVID-19 and 96% were happy with the distance service.

**For the results of the consultation see 4. below.** A adjustably blended service of physical and distance befriending will help us transition back to a mainly physical service while ensuring we still support as many people as possible and have a robust backup plan if restrictions are tightened.

### Selected Feedback:

#### 1. Quotes from Members

##### What difference has Interest Link made to your life?

It allows me to mix with other people and make friends.

Made me feel more independent and confident.

It brightens my day.

It's made me more confident and I have new experiences & hobbies

I used to spend a lot of time in my room listening to music. Now I can go out and listen to music with my friends.

I loved making films and watching them in the Eastgate Theatre. That was great!

I have a group to go to where I know everyone and really enjoy it  
It has made me feel so much better when I meet my buddy  
It's helped me feel more positive around others and improve my social skills.  
It has helped me to overcome my fears.

I had never joined a group before as I didn't think I would like it but joining baking group with interest link has shown me and people around me what I am capable of!

### **Difference made in lockdown**

It's the only thing I go to that has continued

I am proud that I have managed to join in through Facebook and Zoom as I didn't think I could do it.  
I got a lot out of the zoom meetings as I missed the group meetings.

I was so excited when I got my bingo prize.

In lockdown it was really good to receive all the newsletters, read what everyone else had been getting up to and have things to keep me busy. My phone calls from Alex have also been great and it is good to talk to him about what we have both been doing.

[Lockdown] made me realise how important friends are to me.

I've felt sad and alone [during lockdown]. Lizi has Whatsapp'd me: it's been great.

It's been reassuring because I'd feel lost if no-one was in contact with me.

## **2. Quotes from Carers**

### **Benefits to Members**

My son is homeschooled and the contact and communication with other people out of the house is great for him as he can be quite isolated. He loves coming – it's a good thing for him – it's a big deal.

Nicola has formed a very close friendship with Joss, her 1:1 volunteer, who is her age, which is lovely to see. She has always found relationships with girls of her age problematic and more recently she has formed several friendships outside of Interest Link with peers of her age.

She is approaching everyday life with more confidence and does not get as stressed when things do not work out.

Margaret talks about her befriender a lot: she looks forward to her visits and like the nice things they do together.

It's nice that it's something just for her - she tells us all about it afterwards - it's for her alone and she gets away from us.

They're very good friends, she is special to him. He doesn't have any friends of his own.

At games nights he's able to lose and that's still OK - that's a big thing for him. When he comes home from the club he has stories of what happened with everything.

Interest Link is a massive part of his life, he's constantly speaking about it, it means a huge amount to him. He'd be lost without it, he has no other friends - it's a massive lifeline.

He's a changed man and the majority of this is due to Interest Link

She is more contented in her time at home because she has the regular activities and contact with people other than close family away from the home.

(From a professional carer) Your service is very much needed. If I work with someone who is isolated and I can come to you, it's such a relief to do that.

Our son hasn't many friends so interest link is the only group that he can attend and can enjoy supervised and feel safe outside his home.

Seeing him growing in himself over the years has been amazing.

### **Benefits to Carers**

Gives us valuable time to catch up with various tasks and get some well needed r&r!

We feel it's someone else he knows for when we are not around in the future. That's reassuring.

I relax, sit and read a book, watch telly, listen to music. It gives me a nice opportunity to relax, have time for myself.

I'm happy when he's at Interest Link because I know he's having a good time.

If Katherine is happy it makes me happy: i know that she is enjoying herself and being well looked after.

I get time to do what I enjoy - go for a walk, do housework and go round to the shops if I like. I love that bit of space.

It's helped in a huge way - given him somewhere to go and things to do and given me time to myself.

It gives me joy that he goes out and enjoys himself.

Just to see Victoria happy and with her friends means so much to us.

A wee swim and a sauna revives me and gives me a much needed boost when Robbie is at 'youth club'!

Having a happier child means there is less stress on us.

I'm happy when David is out meeting people – it makes me happy. I do need the service.

Nicola's relationship with Joss has given her somebody else to talk things through which has helped us.

We know he is safe and our stress levels go down.

When he is with his befriender we have a chance to go out and about.

I know he's happy when He's out so I'm happy.

Gavin (his 1:1 link) has been very helpful - I'd know Murray was safe with him. And he would visit Murray if his Dad & I went away for a few days.

### **Difference made in lockdown**

My son doesn't have language but he really enjoys the cooking groups and they are very good for the social aspect. The face to face contact. Zoom would be difficult for him but there have been competitions on Facebook and the activity bags over the holidays. It's been really good.

It was funny for me because I am not the best with tech but I got it sorted with Stef and now it's easy- it is so fab how easily it works'

The 1:1 phone calls have been a blessing.

In the current crisis interest link is a ray of light

Joss throughout lockdown faceted Nicola and they have recently been walking socially distanced

Lizi is a lifeline just now. I'd be devastated without it.

I think that the support that we have had through Covid has been great. Victoria had to shield so didn't leave the house or garden for 3 months. Just to have activities and to keep in touch and hear everyone's news has kept us connected.

Almost all the activities my daughter used to do have been stopped or severely curtailed so any contact and activities are very welcome.

The newsletter he receives as well as his weekly call with Alex has been fantastic.

Really appreciate the service and the contact we have had throughout lockdown..... the recent zoom groups and weekly calls have been great.

Knowing that Interest Link is there is vital.

It's so important just now, you've no idea.

Always great to receive messages during and after lockdown. Looked forward to seeing them!  
Certainly kept us all busy and entertained.

The zoom links have been excellent.

It's been lovely: she's linked up with Whatsapp talking to others as well as her phone buddy. And she's had fun with the newsletters.

The on-line chats really doesn't work for her.

It's been fabulous, it's been a lifeline to him.

Interest Link has been the only organisation to keep in regular touch. Well done to all.

I would have liked to see the group use zoom to keep the service users in touch with each other.

It was good for my clients to take part in a videocall and interact with their friends. Also the activities that have been sent to keep them busy has been fantastic.

The team have been supplying our daughter with loads of activities during COVID and now the video meeting has meant there is more interaction.

### **3. Quotes from volunteers**

#### **Learning Disabilities Awareness**

Volunteering has definitely increased my awareness. Just seeing the vast number of different disabilities people have and being able to first hand see how they cope with them on a daily basis has been so insightful. Seeing everyone at interest link together and how much enjoyment they get from the interaction and communication also gave me a greater appreciation for the smaller things in life.

She is lovely and fun, one of the best people I've ever met.

Just being out and about socially with Valerie has made me more aware of the challenges they face daily with the way people react to them

I have realised how difficult it can be for people with learning disabilities to communicate and how hard it can be for their families to communicate with them

Given me insight into the struggles of not only the person with the disability but also the impact on their family and emphasised the resilience they need to cope with these difficulties.

They are often isolated and have very few if any friends. Support workers do not have time to socialize with them.

I learnt that it is hard as a teenager with learning disabilities to integrate and to find situations to hang out with other students from high school. Interest link is a great way to make that network and is a space for the service users to socialise.

Ended up attending sporting events/concerts where large crowds were gathered, and we both felt comfortable in each other's company and with other people we met.

Has shown me how the interest link groups are often the only social activity that some people have access to.

### **Confidence with people with learning disabilities**

It spurred me on to take up a college course and a qualification to work in the social services sector

Before I started interest link I was never friends with anyone with a learning disability but I feel like now I am and I can be more open to forming friendships.

Definitely feel happier to just begin conversations and speaking with the service users feels much more natural and genuine now.

I think I now know how to start up conversations but also know when to back off if someone seems anxious for example. I also know to take my time and allow someone within a learning disability to open up within their own time.

It made me more confident to say hello and start up a conversation with people with learning disabilities at school.

In the beginning I found it daunting but then soon realised that if you are friendly and encouraging great relationships can be formed easily.

Much happier to meet new people with learning disabilities, letting go of any preconceptions in that each person is an individual with a unique personality and take on the world

### **Changes in Members**

As you develop your relationships with the service users at Interest Link you definitely see a growth in their confidence whether it's when they're participating in activities or when you're talking to them individually.

Noticed the improvement in confidence of the new members between when they first joined and much later, where they are more comfortable with making conversation and during activities.

I remember one of the service users being very quiet when I first met her yet after a couple sessions she started to open up and play more games - you could see her confidence grow.

I've noticed people in the group becoming more confident and outgoing

I have seen my buddy be more socially confident & growing up.

One of the best parts of volunteering is seeing how happy the service users are and how much they need the activities.

I definitely noticed over time some of the quieter SU interacting with me more. Choosing to share stories and visibility relax further as the sessions continued. During a team "build the best planet" I

found they were excited to give their ideas and suggestions. Absolutely everyone joined in and spoke up.

I noticed a SU was non verbal, avoided eye contact and stayed on the periphery on my first session there. The last time I attended they were right in the middle, and then sat with me whilst completing crafty activity. Their positive body language and some eye contact was such a contrast to when we first met.

When we are on outings I have noticed that shes not as reserved when talking to shop assistants, bus drivers etc.

### **Increased need over lockdown**

Lockdown was obviously quite a lonely time for a lot of people so having interest link sessions brings the community feel back and reiterates that no one is alone.

People may feel isolated during these tough times and I feel interest link provides a friendly face and something to look forward to

I certainly feel that this has put a strain on a lot of peoples mental health and it always helps to meet people and have a chat.

It has shown how vital the contact is for a lot of people

I found it really great to still be able to volunteer and see everyone at Interest Link via Zoom during Lockdown as it helped me feel less lonely.

The group is needed more than ever.

## **4. Feedback on current service and consultation on future developments**

### **Background to consultation and planned action as a result of it.**

We tried out a wide variety of distance befriending approaches during lockdown including newsletters, home activities, Zoom, telephone calls, WhatsApp and Facebook, and these varied from branch to branch to suit local conditions. The priority was to ensure no one was left out and that activities should be available on an ongoing basis rather than just once a fortnight.

The consultation asked about the experience in lockdown and views on an adjustable blended service using Zoom & social media (with linked home activities) and telephone contact as a way to transition back to physical services. As the responses below reflect, this met with a high level of approval. Zoom got the most attention, with many responses saying that it should continue or (where not already available) that they would have liked it to have had it, but a few also saying it would not work for them. Distance delivery has also brought benefits people don't want to lose, such as more contact between physical meetings.

In the immediate future (October-December 2020) we will keep all aspects of the distance service operating but focus our development efforts on helping as many people as possible onto Zoom and social media, including providing tablets and internet connections where needed. 1:1 links have already started to see each other physically and we have made new 1:1 links between people who

knew each other from their groups. We have plans in place for small physical groups but activity will probably be low as groups are very vulnerable to restrictions being re-imposed and the staff time required would mean leaving a lot of people without a distance service: the only statutory services that have restarted are the schools, so we are still a lifeline for many.

Hopefully from the New Year we can accelerate the transition to a more universal physical service on our usual schedule, with Zoom meetings and social media substituting where necessary and providing a backup if restrictions tighten once more.

**Members re how we could make Interest Link better.**

I would like to keep Zoom – I have gotten a lot from it

Singing Group.

I want to meet up with my friends again. Meeting on Zoom would be better than not actually meeting each other.

I enjoy dominoes and draughts, so it would be good if I could do these at Interest Link.

Have it on once a week instead of fortnightly, I really enjoy being able to get out with people more my age.

It would be good to try to get an overnight stay with my group friends.

More outings: I enjoy trips.

It's a great service, it's all good. Can't make things better than that.

Before the groups start properly I'd be happy with Zoom groups or a smaller group

Zoom meetings.

Having a murder mystery night or something to do with Harry Potter.

Have a dance group.

**Members' favourite activities during lockdown**

I loved the cooking.

Colouring in and doing the crafts with the newsletters.

Growing the sunflowers and trying out some of the recipes.

The phone calls with Frances

Speaking to Susan on the phone, and the newsletters, especially the quizzes and wordsearch.

Newsletters and Zoom calls

Whatsapp with Lizi

Cath phoning. I liked the newsletter too, especially the colouring in.

Zoom quizzes and having a phone buddy to speak to. I like getting newsletters too.

The puzzles. Seeing friends in pictures.

The craft activities, receiving letters from my buddy and keeping in touch through newsletters

Whatsapp

Cooking with Debbie, musical bingo and quizzes with Craig and doing arts and crafts.

Origami birds: I loved getting the packs in the post really cheered me up

Seeing everyone again even if it's over zoom

I enjoyed the bingo and interactive quizzes.

The activities sent through the post and the Facebook page

Clubbercise & Childrens group

### **Carers re improvements to physical face-to-face service existing before lockdown.**

I've always been happy with the face-to-face service. There isn't anything I can think of to improve things.

It's a down to earth service, it's run professionally and covers all safety aspects.

Once it's safe, keep going with more expansion of activities, longer away trips, weekly instead of 2 weekly meetings...

I couldn't sing its praises enough. Its been wonderful.

Perhaps a bit more variety in activities from one season to another? A challenge I agree!

### **Carers re proposals for a blended service while some Coronavirus restrictions still in place**

We would hate to think that in the longterm Zoom would replace groups when it is safe to return but it's a good substitute at this time' – family member.

Will try Zoom but not sure how well it will work for my brother because of his hearing, but happy to give it a go.

These are very positive steps and cannot wait.

Zoom sessions would be good as Alexander would be able to see and interact with his friends who he has been unable to see.

This is obviously not as good as face to face but it is good that they can continue to see their friends online and keep in touch.

Need to learn how to use Zoom

It all sounds good. Many thanks to Interest Link for a great service.

Hannah not comfortable with technology.

For now, prefer online activities. It's too soon to start meeting in person.

He struggles with social media but I'm sure he will improve with the service provided

Looking forward to it.

Aaron likes real contact but understand if that can't be

### **Volunteers re possible improvements**



Perhaps the weekly phone call to a service user could be something we could do even after lockdown.

Maybe during lockdown there could have been some more group zoom calls but apart from that nothing.

More Zoom: I was tearing my hair out but now that I am on, it's grand.

I think continuing the newsletters even once sessions resume again would be great. Even if once a month. It continues to give a sense of community and allows people to catch up on how everyone is getting on.

Possibly more 'sport' like activities if it's nice weather outside on the grass

Absolutely nothing, the organization is doing everything right. Honestly, I'm not just saying that, you couldn't have done/do any better. Thank you so much for the opportunity its been amazing.

Create more range of activities.

I feel like sessions could be slightly longer as time flies by!

I think the organisation is already really great: I really appreciate that there is never any pressure on volunteers; it really does feel like a sort of social group- it's not at all artificial or forced- if that makes sense.

More day trips, put groups on more often.

As a volunteer I found at the end of a craft session I was a little disappointed that I had to wait 2 weeks for the next session so more sessions.

Make more people aware of Interest Link.

I don't think you need to improve I do think you need more funding so other people can attend.