



‘How to’ Guide

Social Connectedness Projects

**The keys to life
Development Fund**



The Keys to Life Development Fund

In 2015, the Scottish Government funded fourteen innovative projects that aimed to make a positive difference in the lives of people with learning disabilities. They wanted to know what new ideas worked, and which successful ideas could be replicated elsewhere. This document is a practical guide for anyone interested in replicating one of these projects. It tells you what the projects did, their outcomes, how much they cost, and what steps were crucial to their success.

These projects were funded under the Social Connectedness theme of The keys to life Development Fund. If you would like to find out more information about asset based approaches then visit sclld.org.uk and search for 'commissioned reports'.

Social Connectedness Projects

There were four projects funded under the Social Connectedness theme. The table below shows the organisation, the project and the contact details for the organisation should you wish to find out any more information from the project directly.

| Organisation | Project Name | Contact name | Email address |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Aberdeenshire Council | Fit's for Supper | Lena North Karen Smith | lena.north@aberdeenshire.gov.uk karen.smith3@aberdeenshire.gov.uk |
| Cantraybridge College | Cantray Crew Connects | Norma Cameron | norma.cameron@cantraybridge.co.uk |
| East Dunbartonshire Council | Growing for Growth | Ashleigh Grant-Ng George Burt | ashleigh.grant-ng@eastdunbarton.gov.uk george.burt@eastdunbarton.gov.uk |
| Interest Link Borders | Befriending Project | Andrew Findlay | andrewfindlay@interestlink.org.uk |

Interest Link Borders



Befriending project

Interest Link Borders creates and supports group and one-to-one friendships for children, young people and adults with learning disabilities in the Scottish Borders.

What the project did

Interest Link Borders supported twenty-five adults with learning disabilities over the course of two years, through:

- A friendship group, called The Caledonian Group, comprised of eight people. The group met regularly and went on two overnight trips as part of their activities. The overnights took place at Calvert Trust, Kielder. For some people, this was the first time they had been away from home overnight
- One-to-one befriending links for seventeen people, who met up with their volunteer regularly and took part in a range of community activities, including: trips to the cinema, plays and musicals in the Borders and Edinburgh; Ten Pin Bowling; outings to the Mining Museum, Mary Queen of Scots' House in Jedburgh, Childhood Museum in Edinburgh and the Snowdrop Festival at Dryburgh Abbey.



“Love working with Interest Link. I love interacting with Buddies, love outings with Buddies, also coffee mornings, friendship day - all in all, love it.”

Outcomes from the project

The outcomes achieved by Interest Link Borders for adults with learning disabilities were:

- Safe social connectedness
- Improved happiness/mental wellbeing
- Improved physical wellbeing
- Improved confidence, self-esteem and life skills.

The project did not work directly with family carers. However, as a result of the project activities, the following outcomes achieved for carers were:

- Improved wellbeing
- More opportunities to enjoy a life outside of their caring role and greater sustainability of that role.

The outcome for volunteers was:

- Increased confidence in forming relationships with people with learning disabilities.

What did the project need to succeed?

Interest Link Borders have a strong local presence which they used as the basis for the project. The role of volunteers has been crucial to the success of the project, and it is key that the volunteers are treated well. Interest Link Borders ensure that the volunteers get as much out of the project as both the adults with learning disabilities and the organisation get out of it. This strong focus on the development of the volunteers has benefitted this project greatly.



“Given independence, able to socialise, met new friends.”

What would they change if they did it again?

The project is reliant on specific volunteers and might suffer should those people choose to stop volunteering. Interest Link Borders would need to ensure that they can continue to recruit the right type of volunteer: people who are likely to stay in the area for some time, who are themselves well-rooted in the community and who are able to commit to a long-term link with another person. This would help them avoid becoming over-reliant on their current pool of volunteers.

Financial costs of the project

A breakdown of the costs of the project is shown in the table below. The majority of funding was used for staff costs. There was additional funding used for this project.

| | Total spend |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Capital costs | £ - |
| Office Expenditure | £ 2,448.00 |
| Staff costs | £21,767.00 |
| Volunteer costs | £ 2,065.00 |
| Other costs | £3,651.00 |
| Total | £29,931.00 |

Top five recommendations for running a similar project

1. Communication with all parties is necessary as families, carers, volunteers and members of the group need to know exactly where they stand. Working alongside other agencies is important. It is imperative that you do not try to go it alone as you will need organisational support.
2. Treat your volunteers well and make them feel valued. It is important to respect that they are coming along in their own spare time.
3. Work up a sophisticated planning document with volunteers, service users and parents. This can take some time but it allows all parties to feel involved and to have input into activities. It also enhances the group dynamic.
4. Take time and care with paperwork and general administration; do not underestimate the importance of this work.
5. Be realistic and open-minded with risk assessments. They don't mean things aren't achievable and are not as prohibitive as you might anticipate.

How the outcomes were evidenced

Interest Link Borders produced a survey in 2017, which was supplemented by independent evaluations of the Caledonian Group's overnight trip and their 2016 Friendship Day (which involved all four of their branches) and case studies written by the Roxburgh Co-ordinator.

The survey was used for their 2016-17 Impact Report which covers all four branches, drawing together material they have produced over the last year. The Report also has links to more in-depth material and all the feedback gathered in the survey. They have carried out these large-scale studies every three years since 2004, and the statistics on outcomes can be compared over time. These were usually independent evaluations, but for the 2013-14 Impact Report they shifted to self-evaluation, with assistance from Evaluation Support Scotland.

Aberdeenshire Council: Fit's for Supper

What the project did

Fit's for Supper is an intergenerational and multi-ability supper club. They recruited people with learning disabilities, people with physical disabilities, older people, people with poor mental health, vulnerable parents and people who felt isolated in the community.

The idea was to learn how to cook a new dish each week, prepare it together and then eat it together. They ran ten week clubs in Ellon, Inverurie and Stonehaven. Across these groups they had forty-eight people who finished the Fit's for Supper training, which means that the members had increased their cooking skills.

**“Makes me more happy.
Gets me out, meeting new
people.”**





Outcomes from the project

An altered version of the project is going to continue post-funding from The keys to life Development Fund as the project has secured funding from elsewhere. The outcomes that the project achieved were:

- New and increased cooking skills of members
- Increased confidence to cook through practice and discussion with individuals about the barriers to cooking and how they can be overcome.

What did the project need to succeed?

Drive and flexibility from the staff. They encountered a number of issues that were easily overcome by employing creative and practical thinking. The team recruited a specialist in childcare to support keeping the children occupied during the two hour period that the group was held.

The mixture of people at each of the groups allowed each group to thrive and sparked unlikely friendships. Every aspect of the connection with the participants matters; from the first telephone call to the final evaluation sheet - kindness and recognition speak volumes to people and keeps up their motivation and keeps the ability to change flowing.

What would they change if they did it again?

The team were faced with two recruitment issues that they would be able to resolve sooner if they ran the project again. They would recruit the specialist in childcare sooner than they did and they would make sure that recruitment materials were delivered to the right channels as complications here delayed recruiting the appropriate people.

Transferring the skills learned at the group to the home was also an issue as this is very much dependent on the facilities people have at home and the support (or otherwise) of family. But where these barriers have been overcome, the team recorded many examples of where the recipes were tried again at home, which led to confidence issues being overcome.

Top five recommendations for running a similar project

1. Staff must be driven and flexible to make this project succeed. A strong initial plan makes it easier to deviate if the need arises.
2. It is important to invest thought in how to handle any potential childcare issues that could arise.
3. Make sure that the group has a good mixture of participants. The best groups are those in which people get to make friends with people who they might not normally get the chance to speak with.
4. If you are recruiting staff then make sure you go through the correct channels to ensure you get the right people.
5. Integrate the theory lessons into the cooking lessons as there is very little interest in theory delivered.

“I’m going to miss it now that it’s finished. My mum says my confidence at home has grown. Now I’m going to start at the pop up shop.”



Financial costs of the project

A breakdown of the costs of the project is shown in the table below.

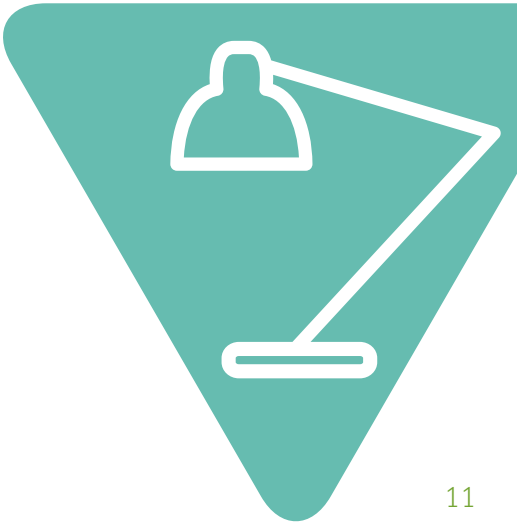
The majority of funding was used for other costs. There was no additional funding used for this project.

| | Total spend |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Capital costs | £ - |
| Office Expenditure | £ - |
| Staff costs | £1,152.63 |
| Volunteer costs | £ 350.00 |
| Other costs | £17,714.54 |
| Total | £19,217.17 |

How the outcomes were evidenced

Fit’s for Supper used a number of different evaluation methods throughout the course of the project. They had weekly quizzes for members that included being able to correctly identify different types of food, the correct utensils to use in food preparation and facts about nutrition. They also had weekly evaluations about inclusion and connectedness from the group; these were based on how the members felt they had connected during the session and the project as a whole.

“The tutors were amazing .I thoroughly enjoyed it – it gave me a lot of confidence. Play leaders who looked after the children were good.”



Cantraybridge College: Cantray Crew Connects


What the project did

The funding was used to support a light-touch social network of former and existing students at Cantraybridge College. The network functions as a regular alumni association, providing support about ongoing opportunities for social interaction and access to opportunities to take part in social and health-based activities. To achieve this, Cantraybridge College:

- Established the infrastructure for a network of former young people who have left Cantraybridge. This infrastructure includes meetings, a Facebook group and social media training
- Established membership criteria and member benefits including up to 10 discounts from local retailers and catering establishments
- Established a steering group for young people to identify their ideas and priorities for the network's annual activities.



**“Made a big difference to me.
It’s very important to keep
friendships.”**



Outcomes from the project

Cantray Crew Connects was such a success that Cantraybridge College have decided to make the alumni network part of the core work plan. This decision was taken after the organisation realised how successfully their outcomes were achieved. Their outcomes include:

- Created an innovative way to maintain connectedness after college by building circles of support online and face-to-face
- Increased opportunities for social connectedness when formal support structures are reduced upon leaving college
- Increased capacity within the community to stay connected.

What did the project need to succeed?

This project succeeded due to the connection and communication between members of staff and students, both current and former. The project was built around the qualities of the staff who were already in place and this meant that Cantraybridge had the capacity for this project to succeed. There was also a Peer Advisor who helped bridge any gaps between staff and students.

As the staff knew the dynamics and tensions of the group, this allowed for potential issues to be managed in a subtle, tactful manner. This helped to generate a sense of community within the group.



What would they change if they did it again?

The staff at Cantraybridge would have kept in contact with more former students and have more creative means of keeping in contact with them. The staff attempted to use a Facebook group, but it has not proven as popular as they would have liked.

As a result staff have had to ensure there are other means of keeping in touch with people. Staff would also consider rotating the roles members have in the network (e.g. Chairperson) to give different people the opportunity to have more involvement.

The team have not worked as well with local service providers as they would have liked and identified contacting local retailers to secure discounts earlier in the process as a point for improvement.

“I think it’s good. It’s great as it has improved my independence. It was hard when I left Cantraybridge. Cantray Crew has helped me through tough times. I have enjoyed all of the events.”

Top five recommendations for running a similar project

1. From the outset, ensure you do not raise expectations that activities will be free. Consider the long term sustainability of the project at the outset.
2. Be prepared to support the committee with regard to setting dates, arranging venues, frequency of meetings, preparing minutes, setting agendas and planning activities. The team were fortunate that the secretary of the committee was also a peer advisor within another area of the organisation and had previously received a lot of training.
3. Ensure there is appropriate volunteer support in place depending on the activity and students taking part.
4. Do not think you cannot say 'no' to someone being part of the group if they display inappropriate behaviour.
5. Be clear about what support is offered when attending activities i.e. consider if someone requires one-to-one support/intensive support and how this can be managed within the constraints of the project/funding.



“I think it’s just great to come together and go out and about. It’s helping me gain independence and gain new friends.”

Financial costs of the project

A breakdown of the costs of the project is shown in the table below. The majority of funding was used for staff costs during the project. There was no additional funding used for this project.

| | Total spend |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Capital costs | £ - |
| Office Expenditure | £8,231.34 |
| Staff costs | £19,180.66 |
| Volunteer costs | £714.00 |
| Other costs | £4,146.00 |
| Total | £32,272.00 |

How the outcomes were evidenced

Cantraybridge College evidenced their outcomes in a number of different ways. They captured a number of events through pictures during the project. These include a 'time capsule' event that they held in Autumn 2016, as well as Halloween and Christmas events. These pictures showcase the 'togetherness' of the group during their activities.

The team also used a number of evaluations throughout the course of the project which highlight the positive impact the network has had on its members.

East Dunbartonshire Council: Growing for Growth

What the project did

This project was run by East Dunbartonshire's Local Area Coordinators (LACs). It aimed to address health inequalities experienced by people with learning disabilities. It tried to do this by promoting healthy eating and addressing social isolation.

The idea was to establish a working community garden that provides a focus for people with learning disabilities and other community members to meet and grow vegetables. The project also involved setting up a supper club run by and for the community, including people with learning disabilities. A number of cooking programmes were delivered so that members could learn to prepare food for the supper club.

The grounds of a recently re-built and modernised Community Centre in a significantly deprived area of Kirkintilloch were designated for the Community Garden. This Community Centre is also the site of a community kitchen which was used to run the Supper Club.

They laid the groundwork for this by:

- Establishing a steering group for the running and management of the project
- Raising awareness among community groups of the Community Garden development and associated healthy eating activities
- Identifying and hiring suitable training kitchens
- Identifying key individuals with expertise in landscaping, design and gardening.



Outcomes from the project

The outcomes achieved by Growing for Growth were:

- Participants feel healthier and have an increased sense of physical and mental wellbeing
- Participants meet new people and feel more involved in the wider community
- Participants feel involved in the design, maintenance and development of the project
- Participants understand healthier lifestyle choices.

As a result of the success of the Supper Club, the LACs will be incorporating it into their regular suite of activities. Additionally, they are in discussions with partners to focus on the community garden aspect of the project in the coming year.

How the outcomes were evidenced

Growing for Growth used a number of different methods to evidence their outcomes for the project. They conducted both pre and post questionnaires for the cooking lessons. These questionnaires were developed by the NHS and went into depth about increased confidence in cooking, how many meals they cooked from raw ingredients and what a typical day's diet looked like.

In addition to this they also interviewed The Supper Club group informally to gain a sense of how people were feeling and integrating socially. Furthermore they are in the process of producing a video, which should be available in September 2017.



What did the project need to succeed?

The mentality and flexibility of staff allowed this project to succeed. There were several legal issues surrounding the ownership of the land selected for the Community Garden, which meant that this part of the project had to be suspended. The mentality and flexibility of staff enabled them to quickly focus on the cooking programmes and Supper Club, and get that up and running whilst the disputes over the land happened.

Dynamic partnership working was vital to the success of the project. Partnerships between different Services within the Council were vital to establishing the legal situation of the land. The partnership they had with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde was paramount to the success of the Supper Club.

What would they change if they did it again?

The project co-ordinators had applied for funding for several different projects at the same time, Growing for Growth included, and were successful in a number of these applications. This meant that they were somewhat stretched with staffing issues.

The aforementioned legal issues over the land were something the project wish they had known about prior to the project beginning. However, these issues were unknown even to East Dunbartonshire Council before this project began.

Additionally they would like to have included more than just people with learning disabilities in the project, which could lead to a greater level of inclusion.

Top five recommendations for running a similar project:

1. When dealing with Council owned property it is important to know the protocol for using the land and to know who officially owns the land.
2. Dynamic partnership working is key to this type of project. The links with Council Services and the NHS were vital to the success of the project.
3. A robust plan incorporating both timelines and financial information early on is very important. A solid plan makes flexibility easier if issues arise.
4. It is important to know the organisational structures of both the Council and the NHS.
5. Visiting more mature projects (such as the Lambhill Project) can help with inspiration.

Financial costs of the project

A breakdown of the costs of the project is shown in the table below. The majority of funding was used for capital costs. There was additional funding used for this project.

| | Total spend |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Capital costs | £2,377.87 |
| Office Expenditure | £400.00 |
| Staff costs | £1,435.00 |
| Volunteer costs | £100.00 |
| Other costs | £1,207.27 |
| Total | £5,520.14 |



