

Fun Trips Community Exchange Participation Outward bound Dream big

Meet new people Learn about life Team building Connect Play Connect Youth work

Learn new skills Play Connect Youth work

Confidence Play Connect Youth work

Learn about life Team building Connect Play Connect Youth work

Meet new people Exchange Community Fun

Opportunities After school club Opportunities Dream big

CONNECT

Berwickshire Youth Project CLG



Annual REPORT 2023/24



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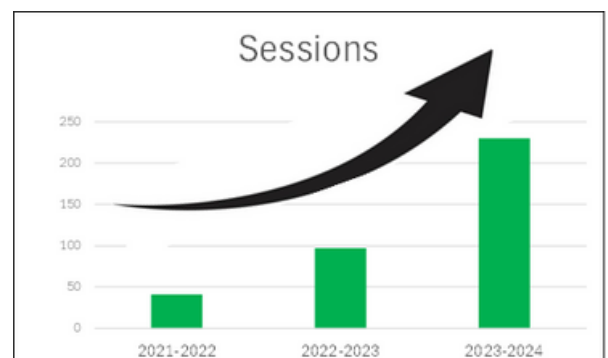
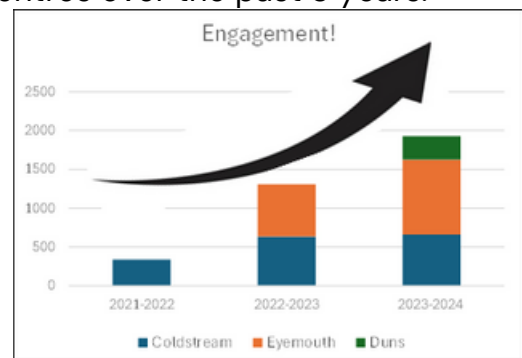
Once again, I would like to thank all of the staff, volunteers and my fellow directors/trustees of Connect Berwickshire Youth Project (Connect) who have continued to work hard to sustain and grow the charitable company through this latest financial year.

After regrouping in 2021 – 2022, 2022 – 2023 and 2024 have seen a period of reopening and refocusing of the youth work we perform at our centres across Berwickshire.

It gives me great pleasure to say that our Youth group delivery really began to take off during this period. We have been able to progress our plans and increase our reach by continuing to offer free Youth Group sessions in Coldstream by establishing the same service very successfully in Eyemouth. In 2024 we have further been able to delivery against our strategy by restarting Youth Drop-ins at our Duns facility.

These newly revamped 'drop ins' have really helped to broaden the scale of our reach. This as reflected in the number of individual engagements with young people as measured by our dedicated staff delivering the sessions.

The charts shows the superb, positive trend of our youth work delivery across our centres over the past 3 years:



Thanks to gracious funding from Scottish Borders Council, The Scottish Children's Lottery Trust, the National Lottery Community Fund and very welcome cooperation and assistance from partners, Youth Borders, Youth Link Scotland, Splash and Scotland Community Police Officers, it is also very pleasing to be able to report that we were able to deliver an expanded summer programme delivery in 2023. We worked with over 180 young people across Berwickshire during summer 2023 and we were able to have our young people help plan the programme to ensure it delivered the activities they wanted to take part in.

Over the past year, we have also enhanced our relationships with Eyemouth High school and Berwickshire High School, through the relaunch of our Stepping Stones partnership. The Stepping Stones project facilitates direct sessions in and out of the school but delivered by a dedicated Youth Worker. For example, we have been able to regularly deliver weekly one-to-one sessions with more than seven pupils in one school alone.

We continue to work closely with funders to secure our activities for future years and we have launched a multifaceted, multi-year Recovery Plan designed to bring the charity finances to a truly sustainable footing for the long term.

This plan builds on the ongoing financial control exercised by the board in conjunction with the charity's managers and seeks to address the key financial pillars of the organisation by:

- Understanding the nature, size and drivers of any shortfalls in income versus needed expenditure
- Continuous review of ongoing expenditure – in particular overhead costs related to our operational sites
- Actively seeking and applying for grant funding that will address specific challenges or unfunded overhead costs
- Implementing active fundraising channels to allow and encourage receipt of direct donations
- Seeking to build a broad family of Patrons who can support the charity
- Actively seeking sponsorship or grant support from entities beyond our normal funding partners
- Establishing a review process to measure progress against our targets and a communication plan to ensure all stakeholders are well informed

I am pleased to say that this plan is now being followed through and we are seeing the first shoots of progress towards our goals.

If you are interested in becoming a Patron of the charity, please speak to our Manager or a Trustee and we will be very pleased to welcome you to the fold! Please take time to look through our Facebook page and main web page to see what sort of activities we deliver for young people via our centres.

<https://www.facebook.com/byconnect>
www.byconnect.com



MANAGERS REPORT

As we wrap up the 2023–2024 year, I'm very pleased to share the remarkable progress and achievements of the Connect Berwickshire Youth Project. It's been a transformative time, marked by stronger partnerships, expanded services, and an unwavering commitment to providing accessible, high-quality support for young people and their families.

I want to thank the staff past and present for their continued support, dedication and hard work over the past 2 years. It is because of an amazing team that we are able to highlight the amazing work being delivered for young people across Berwickshire.



One of our key focuses has been building and strengthening local partnerships. Our collaborations with organisations like Splash, Police Scotland, and local groups, as well as the secondary schools across Berwickshire, have boosted our service delivery. These relationships have allowed us to introduce new programmes, access more resources, and ensure truly comprehensive support for the young people we serve.

We're also thrilled to have increased our funding base this year, thanks to support from the Robertson Trust, Gannochy Trust, National Lottery Cost of Living fund, and an extension of our Stepping Stones project with the National Lottery. This vital funding has strengthened our financial footing, letting us expand our services and deliver consistently impactful programming.

Over in Duns, we've expanded our presence, ramping up to weekly sessions that have become a cornerstone of community interaction, giving local young people a reliable space for growth, social engagement, and skill-building. The consistent, dependable support we can now provide there has been pivotal.



Our one-to-one support services have also seen a big boost this year, offering personalised guidance and mentoring to young people facing unique challenges. These sessions have delivered essential emotional and practical support, helping participants build trust, discuss their concerns in a safe environment, and develop strategies for personal growth.

Our expanded Summer Activity Project included an amazing trip to Blackpool Pleasure Beach, where we took 30 young people for a day of fun and bonding. It was a unique opportunity for many to experience new environments, create friendships, and build confidence – and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with participants and families praising the enriching experience.

A core value for Connect is ensuring all our programmes and activities are free of charge, eliminating financial barriers to participation.



Looking ahead, Connect Berwickshire Youth Project will keep focusing on enhancing resilience, confidence, and well-being for young people across the region.. It's been a year of growth, stronger connections, and unwavering dedication to supporting Berwickshire's young people, and we're excited to keep this crucial work going.



END OF YEAR ACTIVITIES: SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2023

To close out 2023, Connect delivered a packed schedule of activities that brought excitement and joy to young people across Berwickshire. During the October break, we hosted a variety of in-house sessions and welcomed partner organisations to provide unique and engaging opportunities. One of the highlights was our collaboration with Splash to organise a Halloween Party for juniors and seniors in Eyemouth, as well as festive sessions in Duns and Coldstream. These events were a great success, filled with laughter, games, and creativity.

Connect was also honoured to receive a nomination through the Youth Inspire awards locally to the Scottish Borders. Although we did not win, we were pleased to begin to be recognised for the work we believe is an important part of Berwickshire.



As Christmas approached, we once again partnered with Splash to support their Christmas Hamper initiative. We donated 85 recipe books, Meals for Under a Fiver by MealsByMitch, along with £5 ASDA vouchers for each hamper. Thanks to Mitch's generous contribution of additional books, we were able to ensure that families had practical tools to prepare affordable and nutritious meals over the holidays.

In addition to this, we provided Christmas meals for over 60 young people. Eyemouth enjoyed a sit-down meal catered by First and Last, while Coldstream celebrated with our annual Chinese meal. These events offered young people a festive gathering where they could enjoy good food and the holiday spirit.

Along with our Christmas efforts, our Staff went above and beyond, securing gifts for young people with the help of Lime and Co, who donated hundreds of items. To add a touch of holiday magic, we introduced a Christmas Post Box, where younger kids could send letters to Santa and receive personalised replies from the Connect team as Santas little helpers.

These end-of-year activities offered young people meaningful holiday experiences, emphasising the importance of celebration, generosity, and joy.



COLDSTREAM: A YEAR OF GROWTH AND ENGAGEMENT (MONDAYS)

This year marked an exciting milestone for the Coldstream Youth Drop-In, with our big move from the Community Centre tower to the Annex at Coldstream Primary School in January. The new space has brought numerous benefits, creating a more inclusive, accessible, and dynamic environment for our young people.

The Annex's single-level layout has allowed us to safely engage with larger groups. The addition of comfortable sofas has transformed the space into a welcoming hub where young people can relax and socialise in groups. With direct access to the school playground, we've incorporated more outdoor activities, enhancing the variety of experiences available. Additionally, generous food donations from the Food Larder have enabled us to consistently provide nutritious snacks and meals, making every session a little brighter.

The young people have truly made the space their own, contributing ideas and suggestions for new board games and activities. This sense of ownership has boosted their engagement and excitement for the drop-ins. During February and Easter breaks, we hosted takeaway nights, where young people gathered for a meal and stayed for the connection and fun. Our summer Neon Party was a highlight, featuring a lively "pub" quiz, limbo competitions, and fancy dress, with plenty of prizes awarded throughout the evening.



Beyond the fun, our sessions have provided opportunities for skill-building and personal growth. Activities have included wellbeing workshops, tie-dye projects, sticker making, clay modelling, and karaoke. These sessions have encouraged creativity, self-expression, and teamwork, helping young people explore their interests and develop new skills.

We've also been fortunate to host Community Police Officers Suzie and Kris, who visited on two occasions. These sessions allowed young people to learn about personal safety, explore police equipment, and even experience sitting in patrol cars. These interactions have fostered positive relationships between young people and local police, promoting a sense of security and trust within the community.

The Coldstream Youth Drop-In has grown into a vibrant space where young people feel valued and supported. This year's achievements reflect Connect's dedication to providing enriching, accessible opportunities that empower young people to thrive. From creativity to building community connections, the Coldstream Drop-In has been a resounding success, and we look forward to continuing this impactful work in the coming year.



DUNS: A FRESH START (WEDNESDAY)

This year, Connect made the strategic decision to temporarily pause our sessions in Duns to regroup, rebuild, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our services. This decision, while challenging, allowed us to focus on testing and refining new approaches in our other areas, ultimately redistributing staff resources to reintroduce a weekly Wednesday session in Duns.

During this rebuilding period, we prioritised community input by holding a consultation with local parents, community members, and young people. Their feedback was invaluable, helping us shape a service that truly reflects the needs and interests of the Duns community. This collaborative effort marked a turning point, setting the foundation for a more dynamic and engaging youth service.



When we reopened, we were excited to launch a revamped Drop-In model, replacing the traditional “youth club” structure. This shift has transformed our offering into a flexible, inclusive space where young people can come together, connect with peers, and participate in activities at their own pace. The impact of this change has been clear—starting with just 4 attendees, our sessions have grown steadily, now regularly welcoming 12–15 young people each week.

The growing attendance demonstrates the community’s trust in Connect and the value young people place on having a safe, welcoming space to call their own. Through the new Drop-In model, we are not only meeting immediate needs for social connection and recreation but also gaining sense of belonging and ownership among the young people of Duns.

This journey has highlighted Connect’s adaptability and commitment to delivering meaningful, responsive services. By engaging with the community and tailoring our approach, we’ve successfully revitalised our presence in Duns, creating a sustainable and impactful programme that continues to grow in strength and reach.



EYEMOUTH: BUILDING TRUST AND UNDERSTANDING (THURSDAY)

Looking back to late autumn of 2023, our drop-in sessions in Eyemouth presented valuable opportunities for growth and learning, particularly with the junior group. While initial engagement proved challenging, this period highlighted the importance of fostering trust and understanding between young people and youth workers.

Many young people were still adjusting to the return of in-person activities following the disruption of the Covid-19 lockdowns. These restrictions had limited their exposure to face-to-face youth work, and for some, it was their first experience engaging with youth workers in an informal setting. This adjustment phase offered Connect a chance to introduce young people to the principles of youth work, helping them understand that youth workers are there to support and guide them, not to impose authority or judgement.

Through consistent effort and a welcoming approach, our team in Eyemouth worked to break down barriers and challenge misconceptions. By creating a safe, non-judgmental environment, we gradually built relationships based on mutual respect and trust. Young people began to see drop-ins as a space where they could freely express themselves, explore their interests, and connect with peers, all on their terms.

The progress made during this time demonstrates Connect's commitment to meeting young people where they are and supporting them as they navigate their unique journeys. This experience has laid a strong foundation for continued growth and engagement, ensuring that Eyemouth's young people feel valued, understood, and empowered to take full advantage of the opportunities available to them.

Eyemouth has been growing steadily for some time, rebuilding relationships with the community and working closely with families to gain as much support as they can from Connect services. Connect continues to deliver high quality youth work, with the inclusion of our new Kitchen, allowing young people to grow their skills through kitchen and cooking.

THE IMPACT OF OUR ACCESSIBLE KITCHEN ON DROP-INS AND 1:2:1 PROJECTS

The newly refurbished kitchen at Connect Berwickshire Youth Project, funded by the CLLD Fund from SBC in 2024, has become a valuable resource for our drop-in sessions and 1:2:1 support. This renovation allows us to provide both food and hands-on learning experiences that benefit young people in multiple ways.

During drop-ins, we noticed many young people attending sessions hungry, especially during school holidays. By offering meals, we ensure their basic needs are met, allowing them to fully engage. Beyond addressing hunger, the kitchen enables youth to learn vital cooking skills, fostering healthier eating habits and nutritional awareness.

Cooking also supports language and literacy development, as participants follow recipes and instructions. They practise numeracy skills through budgeting and measuring ingredients. The hands-on experience boosts confidence and self-esteem, as young people take pride in preparing meals for peers.

The kitchen has been especially beneficial for 1:2:1 support, where young people can explore cooking in a focused, safe environment. This tailored approach helps them develop at their own pace, gaining both practical skills and a sense of accomplishment.



THE IMPACT OF GAMING PCS (2023-2024)

The funding from the SBC CLLD Fund has allowed us to invest in four high-spec gaming PCs, enhancing our resources for young people. These PCs have become a key tool for skill-building, educational support, and online safety awareness.

The PCs have helped young people develop digital skills, from basic computer literacy to advanced coding and creative projects. Workshops and collaborative activities encourage teamwork and spark interest in tech-based careers. They have also supported young people in higher education by providing a reliable space for coursework and online classes, overcoming barriers posed by limited home access to technology.

A key focus has been teaching online safety. Sessions cover topics like phishing, protecting personal information, and understanding digital footprints, equipping young people with the knowledge to navigate the digital world safely.

The gaming PCs have also fostered community connections, allowing young people from different parts of Berwickshire to socialise, collaborate, and combat rural isolation. By providing access to advanced technology, we have leveled the playing field, ensuring all participants benefit from these opportunities, regardless of background.





SUMMER PROGRAMME 2024

The 2023 Summer Programme at Connect Berwickshire Youth Project was a resounding success, delivering a wide range of enriching activities that engaged over 100 young people from across Berwickshire. This programme offered invaluable experiences, all free of charge, ensuring financial barriers did not prevent participation. Through a combination of local sessions and exciting trips, the programme provided young people with opportunities for personal growth, social connection, and fun.

ACTIVITIES DELIVERED

The programme included multiple in-house sessions such as pizza making, baking, games, and creative workshops. Outdoor activities ranged from park and beach outings to more adventurous experiences, like RIB boat trips for young people from Duns, Eyemouth, and Coldstream. Additionally, we hosted four sessions at Foxlake for specific groups, including one tailored for senior young people in Eyemouth. The highlight of the summer was a full-day trip to Blackpool Pleasure Beach for 30 young people from across Berwickshire.

BLACKPOOL PLEASURE BEACH TRIP

For many young people, this was their first visit to Blackpool, making it a milestone experience. The day provided them with a unique opportunity to explore independently while knowing they had the support of our staff when needed. The trip not only fostered independence but also created lifelong memories and strengthened social bonds among participants.



REMOVING FINANCIAL BARRIERS

The total cost of the Summer Programme exceeded £6,000 (Funding from SBC), covering staff salaries, trip expenses, food, and other resources. Every session provided young people with food, including hot meals, ensuring no one went hungry. These efforts ensured that all young people, regardless of their family's financial situation, could enjoy the full benefits of the programme.

We recognise that many families would have found trips like Blackpool or Foxlake unaffordable during the summer holidays. Connect's commitment to equal access meant that every young person could participate without the stress of cost, enabling them to enjoy the same opportunities as their peers.

FEEDBACK AND IMPACT

The feedback from families and young people highlights the profound impact of the programme:

"I honestly couldn't fault it. The kids had so much fun and the forms we were sent were very informative." – Parent

"They went to Blackpool Pleasure Beach which was a very large trip they enjoyed immensely, and they were well supported to be independent." – Parent

"Thank the staff for keeping our son safe and enjoying himself." – Parent

It was so amazing; I loved attending as many as I could because I wasn't doing anything this summer." – Young person, aged 14

When asked what they would have done alternatively -

"Probably would have done less, opened my eyes a little, and just thanks sincerely." – Young person, aged 18

The Summer Programme not only provided entertainment but also supported independence, strengthened peer relationships, and boosted confidence in young people. For many, it was a chance to participate in new experiences and having a long and lasting impact.

STEPPING STONES

Over the past year, the Stepping Stones Project has continued to make a significant difference in the lives of young people across Berwickshire, despite some initial challenges. Recruitment in rural areas like Berwickshire can be particularly difficult, but we are thrilled to now have Ali Sim and Jason Mackinnon on board sharing the role. Their combined expertise and dedication have enabled us to share the workload effectively and extend our reach, ensuring that young people in the region receive the consistent and focused support they need and deserve.

The project has maintained its commitment to providing 1:2:1 support to multiple young people across Berwickshire. These individual sessions have been instrumental in addressing a variety of issues, from building confidence and managing anxiety to developing life skills. The non-time-limited nature of Stepping Stones means that young people can engage at their own pace, allowing for meaningful, tailored interventions that truly meet their personal needs.

Our partnership with Berwickshire High School has been a key element of our work this year. By attending valuable multi-agency meetings focused on mental health and well-being, we have been able to play an active role in shaping the support offered to young people. This collaboration has allowed us to identify early intervention opportunities and ensure that the right support is in place for those who need it most.

In addition to working directly with young people, we have also extended our support to their parents and carers. Recognising that family environments play a crucial role in young people's well-being, we've engaged with parents to provide guidance and reassurance. This holistic approach ensures that families are equipped to support their young people through challenging times, creating a stronger network of care.

The positive outcomes from this work have been clear. Young people engaged with the Stepping Stones Project report increased confidence, improved coping strategies, and a greater sense of stability. Parents have expressed gratitude for the additional support, noting the positive changes they've seen in their children's outlooks and behaviours.

Looking ahead, we are committed to building on these successes and continuing to provide high-quality, impactful support to young people in Berwickshire.

*"I've learned how to cook because of Jason. He has shown me what to do and how to budget so now I know I can feed my brothers if need be". -
Young Person*

CASE STUDIES

"Following on from an initial concern about my child raised directly with me Connect from my child's visits to the local drop ins, it was a concern that I was only slightly aware of but wasn't sure how to deal with and approach solely by myself having tried to reach out to other professions and schools previously. I was finally heard and listened to about my own concerns about my child by Connect and together with David, we worked out an action plan how to fully support both my child and myself going forward.

David & Ali have now liaised with my child's school to provide 1 to 1 support for my child in school time and have spent time discussing and finding the right links for me to provide support for me too. As much as I am very private, they have been very discreet and I know that our issues have been completely confidential.

Connect have been fantastic. David is very understanding and proactive, very knowledgeable and a great source of information and Ali is lovely, very kind and helpful, I have never felt that spending time talking to them has been on the clock or a burden.

Sometimes as a parent you want to be able to do it all yourself but having been able to tap into the time and resources provided by Connect, I've realised even the strongest of us need outside support sometimes too". - Parent



THE PATHWAYS PROJECT

The Pathways Project has been a great part of Connect Berwickshire Youth Project's work over the past year, responding dynamically to the needs of young people and families. As cost of living pressures intensify, the project has provided essential support in areas such as money matters, mental health, and personal development, ensuring that young people feel empowered and better equipped to handle life's challenges for now and the future.



A significant development this year has been the project's deepening collaboration with partners, where increased referrals for 1:2:1 support highlight the growing trust in our services. These sessions have helped young people address challenges such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and navigating transitions. The tailored support allows each individual to set personal goals and work towards achieving them at their own pace, which has proven transformative for many.

Our engagement hasn't been limited to young people; we've also extended support to parents and caregivers, recognising their vital role in creating a stable environment. This holistic approach has strengthened the wider support network, enabling families to feel more confident in handling their collective challenges.

Additionally, through community activities and group sessions, Pathways has opened doors to new opportunities for young people. From creative workshops to skills-based activities, these experiences provide more than entertainment—they offer a platform for growth, connection, and self-discovery.

Securing funding from the National Lottery Cost of Living Fund means we can continue this vital work for another year. This renewed financial backing underscores the value of the Pathways Project and ensures its ability to adapt and meet the evolving needs of the Berwickshire community without disruption.



A HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO DAVID BIRRELL AND TEAM

We would like to extend our deepest thanks to David Birrell Contractors LTD and his team for their incredible support in helping us achieve our vision for an accessible kitchen. When Connect and our young people set out to find the right joiner for the project, David's name was suggested by our young people, who recognised that his personal journey and determination aligned perfectly with our mission.

David's company not only donated over £1,000 towards our kitchen revamp but also generously contributed his time and expertise. He worked closely with Howdens to ensure we secured the best possible deal, going above and beyond to support our project.

We are immensely grateful for David's generosity.



OUR FUNDERS



To access all our funders, please visit www.bypconnect.com

