

**LINK**

**East Fife Mental Health Adolescent Befriending  
Project**

**Annual Report 2023 - 2024**

***"When working with young people there are times when you will see results in 10 seconds and there are times you won't see it for 10 years. Either way, keep planting those seeds of character, eventually they bloom"***



Delivered by



**COMMUNITY  
FUND**



**Scottish Charity No. SC027493**

## **ABOUT LINK**

LINK Adolescent Project was established in January 2003 to provide a befriending service for adolescents (12 – 18 year olds) who were marginalised and isolated due to a mental health issue in the East Fife area. In 2005 the service area expanded to include Levenmouth and in October 2013 service provision increased from 16 to 18 matches. Expansion into the Glenrothes area started in August 2019, with a further expansion into Kirkcaldy in March 2023. Service provision now stands at 32 matches.

The Project recruits, trains and supports suitable volunteers and matches them with young people referred to the organisation by a recognised Key Worker.

The aim of befriending is to enhance the quality of a befriender's life by supporting and promoting their welfare, personal development and capacity for self-determination. This is done by offering the befriender an opportunity to form a trusting relationship, which may enable them to develop a greater degree of resilience, self-confidence, self-esteem and connectedness.

**"If it wasn't for LINK I wouldn't be here."**

**\*Befriending changes and saves lives\***

## **STAFF/COMMITTEE**

LINK is funded for a Project Manager on 27 hours to train, support and supervise 18 volunteers and their young people, and a Project Co-ordinator on 21 hours a week to support 14 volunteers.

### **MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Chair: Susan Matson – CAMHS Clinical Nurse Specialist  
Vice Chair: Neil Kinmont – Befriender  
Secretary: Dorothy Woolley – Volunteer  
Treasurer: Lisa Hainey – Solicitor  
Member: Becca Hutchison - CAMHS  
Member: Emilia Burghilea - Volunteer  
Member: Lee Graham - CAMHS  
Member: Alison Clissold – Volunteer (from December 2023)  
Member: Justine Retford - Befriender  
Link Officer: LeeAnn Sloan, Social Worker

LINK is proud to have representation on the Board of Trustees from our local community including Healthcare Professionals, Volunteer Befrienders, people with lived experience and others from varying backgrounds in mental health, community work and teaching.

## MANAGER'S REPORT

It was great to start the year with three years of substantial Young Start funding plus various grants in place. Meaning Maria and I have enjoyed a much-needed bids breather and could focus more time back on the most important aspect of the Project, folk. Volunteer recruitment continues to be challenging, an issue the whole Sector is experiencing. But we came into our 21<sup>st</sup> year resilient as ever, with Maria making great progress with the Kirkcaldy expansion.

### The Year in Numbers:

- 26 volunteers have befriended 27 young people; 7 newly trained befrienders and 1 new Trustee.
- 24 referrals, an increase of **over 8%** on last year.
- 8 Saltire and 10 Over 25s certificates have been presented to volunteers to celebrating their time commitment to befriending.

**Social Events** – the three group get togethers this year were – Summer Soiree & 20<sup>th</sup> birthday Bash; Cambo outing and the Christmas Meal, with up to 37 folk attending. These events can open up new experiences for the young people, in a safe and supported way, with peer friendships flourishing.

**Volunteer's Week** - this year's wee thank you gift to every befriender was a personalised runner bean plus planting kit. They grew with the person's name on its leaves – which blew my tiny mind!

**FVA Awards Ceremony** – I had a young person who transitioned from befriender to befriender through to the final three of the Young Volunteer Award category. Jade didn't win but will always be a star in our eyes. She was delighted to be nominated and attend the rather swanky event – buying a new dress and having her hair done specially.

- ❖ LINK's Chair Susan Matson was presented with a 25+ Years Long Service Award
- ❖ Plus long service certificates to Dysart for 15 years and Allan 11 years

**KiltWalk** – fun staff fundraiser. The weather was kind and Maria's kids kept us 5k walkers well entertained. We raised £320.

**Volunteer Talks** – were on LGBTQ+ with Chris Dobry and Drugs and Overdose Awareness by Danielle from With You. Both were extremely interesting and engaging, receiving very positive feedback from attendees. Despite carrying out a volunteers' survey, Talk numbers continued to fall, so the sad decision was taken to stop these events.

**\*Thank you, thank you, thank to all our amazing befrienders and trustees**, particularly during these ongoing, increasingly difficult times\* There'd be no LINK, and no young people's lives changed, without you!

**Jane Maciver, Adolescent Project Manager, 31.3.2024**

## **COORDINATOR'S REPORT**

What another great year it has been for LINK with our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations and also expanding our service into Kirkcaldy. Attracting volunteers and raising awareness of the service is always challenging but I have made great in-roads in our new service area as well as forging new connections in Glenrothes. A summary of the year:

- Trained 7 new volunteer befrienders
- 10 matches
- 10 new referrals
- 3 over 25's certificates have been awarded

This year for me has been all about raising our profile in the new area and to assist that, I have worked on our website behind the scenes to make it easier to search for and find by potential referrers and volunteers. This has proved fruitful and we have seen a significant increase in engagement. I was so pleased when Digital Fife asked to showcase our website at their own AGM and the launch of their new platform. We have also combined Facebook pages with the Adult Project to support consistent messaging about our work and reach a wider audience.

The connections I have made with FVA, NHS, Third Sector organisations and Education have been a vital part of driving the expansion into Kirkcaldy forward. Due to the increasing vulnerabilities of many young people being referred it can often take multiple inputs to make a match happen, but it is so worth it when we see these young people begin to flourish.

We created and sent out a Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Survey to everyone involved with LINK to capture the diversity of the organisation and to understand more about the barriers people may face. The results will be presented and also made available on our website.

The volunteer befrienders have been stars again this year and they so often cannot see how much of an impact they are making. One befriender says they cannot believe how much fun they are having and that they genuinely enjoy the time they spend with the young person. I'm sure their positivity absolutely radiates from them each time they meet and can be quite infectious. Thank you to all the wonderful volunteers that give up their time to support and inspire young people. We couldn't do it without you!

Maria Suttie, Project Coordinator, 31.03.24

## SOCIAL EVENTS



Our Autumn outing was at Cambo gardens. We foraged for apples to make bird feeders and enjoyed some chilled time by the campfire cooking sausages and toasting marshmallows.



We had our annual Christmas meal with 37 people in attendance. Fabulous food, company and festive attire.



During the summer we had an extra special celebration at Craigtoun Park to mark **20 years** of LINK.



***"The social events were good as you could talk to other befrienders to see if they had been through the same thing with their befriendee and get some advice."***

***"Thank you for providing such a great service and for helping so many people feel less alone. LINK came to me at a time it was needed the most and i am so so very grateful."***



## LINK 2023 - 2024

**16 newly trained  
volunteers**

**46 volunteers  
involved**

*\*includes 7 trustees*

**Volunteers**

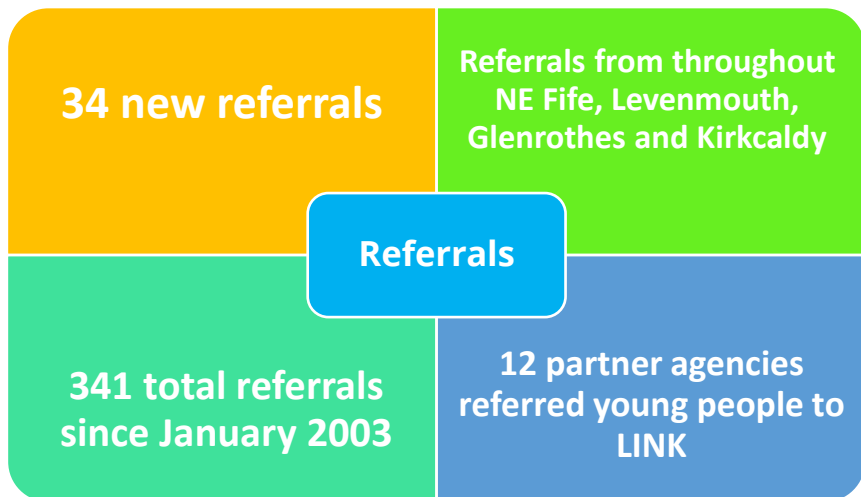
**197 total number of  
befrienders trained  
to date**

**35 volunteers have  
befriended 36 young  
people**

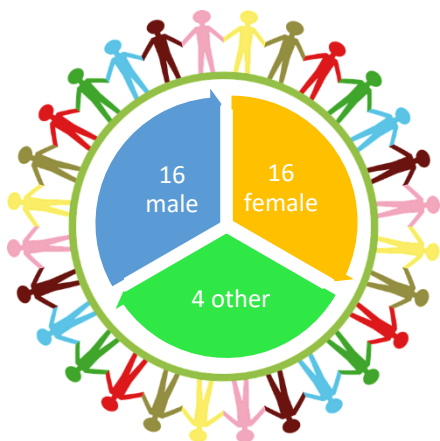
8 Saltire Awards and 13 over 25's certificates have been awarded to volunteers recognising their time commitment to befriending.



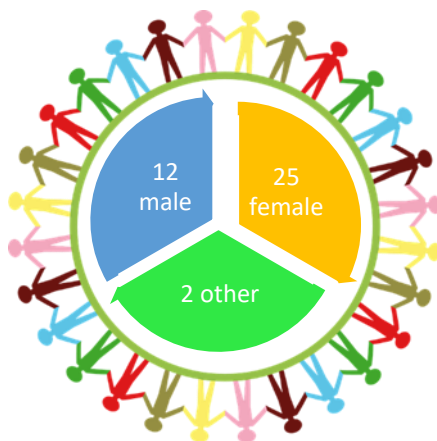




**Young People**



**Volunteers**



\*other includes non-binary, gender fluid or did not wish to identify

## **\*SOME YEAR HIGHLIGHTS\***

### **Fife Voluntary Action Awards Ceremony – shy Susan, Jade and Team LINK**



**Kilt walk**



**Volunteers' Week Thank You gift**



**Allan with his Fife Voluntary Action Long Service Award.**



***"My favourite memory of being a befriender was helping the befriender and seeing them progress. Helping with their problems, see if they can solve it themselves but guide them through it if needed."***

## YOUNG PERSON'S STORY

"Lost. For a long time that was the only word to describe me. I was considered a 'freak' and a 'problem' child just because I struggled to cope with everyday tasks such as attending classes or just sitting still. As a result school was not a pleasant experience for me. By the time I was fourteen I no longer attended regular classes and was placed in the Learning Support department. They didn't really understand how to help or how to deal with me as they couldn't 'see' what was wrong with me. I learnt the hard way that if I wanted to learn something then I'd have to teach myself. I got pretty good at this and unfortunately this caused me to protect myself from the world. I began distancing and isolating myself from my friends and my family because it was difficult for me to realise how much I had changed. By this time I had resorted to self-harm in order just to survive my terrifying life.

When this came to light to the people in my life, it resulted in me having to speak to a counsellor from Playfield. Through my work with her, I began to gain more stability within my life and it was through her that I learnt of the LINK Befriending Project. To be honest I wasn't entirely sure what to think when it was first suggested that I be referred. By this point in my life I hardly socialised with my peers and could barely cope going anywhere that wasn't home, especially at the weekends or evenings. It was always difficult knowing that when the weekend/evening came by I couldn't rely on anyone if I needed them as everyone worked 9-5pm Mon-Fri. I was completely alone during this time. But this changed after I became involved with LINK. The befrienders that I was very fortunate to work with weren't counsellors or professionals but they were there for me at times when others couldn't be. We'd meet up every 2 weeks either at the weekend or one evening after school. No words can describe what that meant. I didn't relate well with people my own age so it was nice to be able to do things like go out for lunch with an adult who wasn't my parent. I gained confidence by being able to experience life without completely losing the protectiveness of an authority figure.

During the course of my four years with LINK I worked with three different befrienders. Each were completely different from the others; the first was a student at University, the second was a working mum

and the third was a great lady who worked in a bank. All were different ages, from different backgrounds and were involved for different personal reasons. More importantly they were all incredible. They were supportive, understanding and non-judgmental. At that point I didn't have a lot of people like that in my life so it was very refreshing and welcome. No-one tried to change me or make me better. I was accepted for being me and none of them cared how different I was. I had the chance to talk about TV programmes and what kind of movies I liked to watch instead of why I couldn't go to class, what was going on inside my head or why I felt the need to do certain things.

I have a lot of great memories from my adventures with my befrienders. The memory I am most reminded of is that one day in the autumn after a lovely but brisk walk along the beach in St Andrews, it started to rain. My befriender and I quickly walked back towards the town and went into a little café for hot chocolate. When our order was brought over, the lady that owned the café placed a plate of pancakes in front of us and said they were on the house because she thought that we looked really cold and would enjoy the warmth. Even after all this time I still remember that day.

Through working with LINK I slowly gained more confidence in myself and more importantly it gave me something to look forward to. I began to feel more comfortable talking to people and learnt how to express my feelings more clearly. I learnt that it was OK to have fun and how to enjoy life again. All this didn't happen overnight but it was worth it. No other service offered me the opportunities that LINK did and everything that I gained from the experience has had a positive impact on my life. I have gone from being the 'freak' and 'problem' child to graduating and setting up my own business.

Even after all these years I still get invited to the summer event. Being invited to these means a lot because it proves to me that I was never just a name or a number on a piece of paper. I was a person worth helping."

## Words from Young People.....

*"the befriending service has helped me a bunch, I no longer need a befriender as I'm doing okay now"*

*"It was so much fun"*

*"Will always appreciate the difference LINK befriending made to me, it should be everywhere! It gave me probably the biggest mental health help."*

*"I had fun and it gave me the chance to get out and do 'fun things' which I didn't have the opportunity to do in my life at that point. My befriender accepted me for me and made me feel wanted and appreciated."*

*"gained confidence outside and on transport"*

*"Before the befriending service I was anxious and rarely left the house. Since meeting with my befriender I have become a better version of me. It's been such a journey, the best part was knowing you have people you can depend on."*

*"Thank you for providing such a great service and for helping so many people feel less alone. LINK came to me at a time it was needed the most and I am so very grateful."*

*"making each other laugh"*

## Words from volunteers.....

*"I think the most important thing I learned or at least got plenty practice of, was accepting my befriender for who he is and not giving up on him at the first sign of trouble – so that he sees people don't always give up."*

*"On a personal level, it taught me patience, helped me to better understand another person and their individual struggles, and how best to help them cope and work through them."*

*"LINK is a very valuable service, which has a very positive affect on people's lives, in a simple but profound way. It was a very rewarding experience getting to know my befriender, and my befriender getting to know me. I really liked that we seemed a very good match. I really appreciated meeting up with the co-ordinator every month. Given that befriending involves working alone it is great to feel supported through regular meetings."*

*"My befriender became a befriender, leaving me a very proud befriender."*

*"The feeling that I was making a difference to a young person's life which is a feeling of purpose that stays with you."*

*"I felt I was making a real difference to someone's life, even just something as small as helping them gain confidence ordering a coffee, or getting the bus. It was an incredibly rewarding experience."*

*"I think LINK offers a vital service in a modern society where people, especially young people, are feeling more lonely and disconnected from their community and the non-digital side of being alive."*

*"One of my favourite memories was early in our befriending when my befriender had returned from our meeting and chosen not to go to bed during the day, but stay up and active. I felt I had made a small, but important difference"*

## ..... and parents/carers

*"Gave her confidence, something to look forward to, a friend, encouraged her to do things, find hobbies. LINK is a fantastic service, made a massive difference, really helped. Thank you for everything, you really made a difference, not just for my daughter but for us as a family."*

*"Helped her with her social skills and independence. It is an excellent service. Well organised matches and lots of fun social events."*

*"As K struggles socially, having a befriender was of immense benefit and gave her something to look forward to."*

*"M was just perfect. This is a 5\* service and has made a world of difference to J's life."*

*"He always seems animated when he comes home and doesn't go back to bed – which is a big deal and has a positive effect for the rest of the day."*

*"LINK is invaluable, you do an awesome job!"*

*"It was the only reason he got out of bed & only time he left the house & his social experience. Excellent input from LINK for a child that otherwise would have remained totally isolated "*

*"He gained confidence being out independently, opening up and chatting through concerns"*



## FUNDING

- Young Start, Community Fund, £98,80, 2023 - 26
- Fife Council's Community Recovery Fund £10,000, 2023-25
- St Andrews University, Community Fund £1,550
- Volunteer Allan who donates his expenses £480.36
- Giving Machine £7.63

Every contribution, no matter how small, truly makes a positive difference to marginalised young people's lives.

LINK also gets an incredible amount of support in kind from the local community, which helps us to deliver our service for the best possible value for money.



## THANK YOU

LINK could not function so efficiently and effectively without the commitment and support provided from a wide range of individuals, organisations and the local community. This year we would like to thank those who have contributed to and supported the Adolescent Project: -

- Our Funders, both past and present. Allan for his volunteer expenses donations.
- Morrisons, St Andrews; Penman Butchers; Barnsmuir Farm; Fisher & Donaldson Bakers; the New Inn and Ceres Inns for all their generous summer soiree donations. The Sunshine Kitchen for their great catering.
- Staff at The Rule for their fabulous festive service and food.
- Judy at Cambo for the fab foraging, crafting and sausage sizzle.
- LINK Management Committee who give their time voluntarily. Their efforts on LINK's behalf are deeply appreciated.
- Befriending Networks, our membership body, for their excellent advice, information, support and events.
- Fife Voluntary Action for their events, guidance and potential volunteers.
- Voluntary Health Scotland, who are the national intermediary and network for voluntary health organisations in Scotland.
- Volunteer Talk Speakers – Chris Dobry, FVA and Danielle Wong, With You Fife
- Susan Matson, my super Supervisor and sounding board!
- LINK Staff for their superb peer support.
- Jane, my supervisor for continued support and belief in me in taking the Glenrothes/Kirkcaldy project forward.
- Willie at Digital Fife for being on the end of an email at any website crisis.
- St Brycedale and St John & Dairsie Churches for their room hire and hospitality
- Fife College for extending their invitation to events.

**And finally, a very special 'Thank You' to our most valued and wonderful volunteer befrienders who make the Project possible by giving their time and commitment to support the young people referred to LINK.**



**<https://www.linkbefriending.org.uk/>**