

LINK

East Fife Mental Health Adolescent Befriending Project

Annual Report 2024 - 2025

"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"



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 (left June 24)
Member: Emilia Burghelea - Volunteer (left June 24)
Member: Lee Graham - CAMHS
Member: Alison Clissold – Volunteer
Member: Justine Retford - Befriender (left June 24)
Member: Jacqueline Goodall - CAMHS (joined Aug 24)
Member: Carole Anderson - volunteer (returned Feb 24)
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's been another tricky year recruiting volunteers and securing funding. Befrienders Ron and Allan donating their expenses gave the funds to secure the services of fundraiser Susan Miller for 4 hours a month. She's impressively complimenting staffs' efforts to give the Project the best financial chance of survival. And continue its life changing work with young people, and volunteers.

The Year in Numbers:

- 22 volunteers have befriended 24 young people; 7 newly trained befrienders plus 2 new Trustees.
- 24 referrals.
- 9 Saltire and 9 Over 25s certificates have been presented to volunteers to celebrating their time commitment to befriending.
- 3 Star Awards – new initiative recognising volunteers who shine. Congratulations Alfie, Allan and Ron.

Social Events – Deer Centre, Summer Soiree, bowling and Christmas meal. These events can open up new experiences for the young people, in a safe and supported way, with peer friendships flourishing. And lots of fun being had.

After a particularly challenging spell staff now have regular wellbeing blethers over a brew. These are invaluable therapeutic. Fair lift your mood! Staff also had a fun wellbeing outing to Levenmouth Hub escape rooms. We completed the challenge with 7 minutes to spare!

Volunteer Words - "I think the service LINK offers is invaluable to the community and has positively affected so many young people and so many befrienders. They make connections between people who might not usually know each other, and they make everyone feel valued and seen by someone else. LINK has been such a force of good for people who might be overlooked by others, while providing its volunteers with fun and learning also. LINK Befriending has been one of the best parts of my university experience - getting to learn about someone else and hopefully helping them to feel valued and supported was a brilliant experience.."

Thank you, thank you, thank to all our amazing befrienders and trustees, we couldn't do it without you

Jane Maciver, Adolescent Project Manager, 31.3.2025

COORDINATOR'S REPORT

What another great year it has been. We have piloted an expansion into Burntisland and Lochgelly, meaning that I am now covering all of Central Fife. Referrals have increased in all areas and volunteer numbers are steadily going up. Networking opportunities with FVA, third sector partners, education, and the Health and Social Care Partnership as well as being out in the local communities has been invaluable and contributed greatly to the growth of the service.

Some numbers for the year:

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

This year has been busy in all areas of the project with efforts centred around securing funding which has been particularly challenging; increasing our online presence; sharing stories and of course maintaining service delivery. Once again, our volunteers have been essential in supporting our young people; building skills, increasing confidence and resilience, trying new experiences and of course having fun! We have had such a range of activities that our matches have been involved in the past year; a pamper morning getting manicures and nail creations; canoeing on Loch Leven; making s'mores on the beach; escape room challenges; mini-golf; trying new lunch venues and pottery making. Having a trusted person to share these experiences with makes a world of difference to our young people.

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, 31.03.25

SOCIAL EVENTS



Our Autumn outing was at ProBowl Glenrothes, with bowling, air hockey and pool, finishing off the evening with pizza. 20 people came along.

We had our annual Christmas meal with 32 people in attendance. Fabulous food, company and festive attire.



Spring: Deer Centre



A fab day was had at the Scottish Deer Centre with a guided tour, feeding the deer, tree-top trail, falconry display and finishing the day off with a picnic in the courtyard catered for by the onsite café.

Summer Soiree



Our annual summer event proved a big hit yet again. This was held at Craigtoun Park and is open to young people and volunteers (past and present) with games, crafting, buffet, scavenger hunt and onsite activities.

"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."

VOLUNTEERS

14 newly trained volunteers

47 volunteers involved

*includes 11 trustees

**18 young people transitioned to become
befrienders**

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

**34 volunteers have
befriended 42 young
people**

10 Saltire Awards and 12 over 25's certificates have been awarded to volunteers recognising their time commitment to befriending. 3 volunteers have received Star Befriender Badge.



40 new referrals

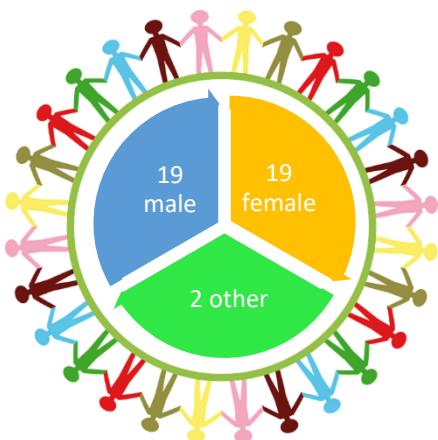
Referrals from throughout
NE Fife, Levenmouth,
Glenrothes, Kirkcaldy

Referrals

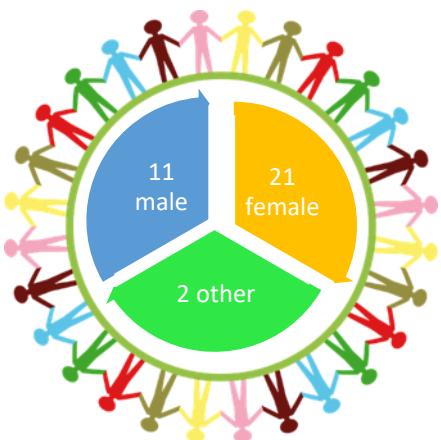
381 total referrals
since January 2003

6 partner agencies
referred young people to
LINK

Young People



Volunteers



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

"I expected befriending to be fun, and challenging. I didn't expect it to be so rewarding! I feel I've gained so much out of Befriending, just as much as my Befriendee says she did."

SOME YEAR HIGHLIGHTS

Volunteers Week

Staff thank you's to their volunteers



RCPCH National Research – LINK was honoured to be invited to part of this work. Five young people met with Anita from Royal College of Paediatrics & Child Health who aim to “Inform and influence child health policy through children and young people’s voices.”

All were really engaged, openly sharing their thoughts and experiences on mental health support services. Young person ***"I felt listened to, that I mattered and can help change things for others"***. The research Report will be presented to the Scottish Parliament. [RCPCH | The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health](https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/young-people-research-project)

Fife Council Young Apprentice of the Year Awards.



LINK was one of the two charities working with children and young people selected this year to receive monies raised at the ceremony. Kingdom Maintenance generously matched the funds. We were delighted to accept the donation of **£3,524.57**.

"My favourite memory of being a befriendee was helping the befriendee 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 anyplace 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 befriendder 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 befriende 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 befriende 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 befriende 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."

"We got on great together, lots in common. Made me go outside more.

Teaching C Scottish slang. "

"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 befriendee 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."

"I think I did not expect to get as much out of it as I did, as I thought the benefit was really for the young person, but I was pleasantly surprised to find it was so much fun!"

"I have gained such an amazing experience, and been able to see the different emotional difficulties and challenges of young people, not only from my befriendee, but from meeting and chatting to others at social events. I have also made an amazing friendship with my befriendee, which I didn't expect when starting out volunteering!"

"My befriendee became a befriendee, leaving me a very proud befriendee."

"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."

"I really enjoyed going out and about and helping the young person. It gave me the feeling of purpose and that it really helped him."

..... 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 befriendee 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 soul 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, £98,800, 2023 - 26
- Fife Council's Community Recovery Fund £10,000, 2023-25 and Rural Poverty Action Group £5,000
- **Volunteers Allan & Ron who donated £1,575 expenses**
- Bank of Scotland £40,000 over 2 years
- Fife Health Charity £4,400
- Fife Council Young Apprentice of the Year Awards £3,524.57
- Mary Moore £3,000
- R&A Town Fund £2,000
- Tesco Stronger Starts £1,500
- The St Andrews Ball £1,000
- Cash for Kids £612
- Asda Grassroots £500.
- Provost Tulloch Trust £500
- Ceres Inn music event raffle raised £180.
- £16.90 from East Fife FC tin
- 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.

“My favourite volunteering memory is the smiles we put on each other’s faces.”

THANK YOUS

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 and Ron for donating their volunteer expenses.
- Tesco's, St Andrews; Penman & Leuchars Butchers; Barnsmuir Farm; Fisher & Donaldson Bakers and Ceres Inn for all their generous summer soiree donations.
- Staff at The Rule for their fabulous festive service and food.
- 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.
- Susan Matson, Jane's super Supervisor and sounding board!
- LINK Staff for their superb peer support.
- Jane, my supervisor for continued support and belief in me to take forward the project to cover Central Fife.
- 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.
- Nina Shiels at International Futures Forum for Kit Bag Training and resources.
- Rowan at the Scottish Deer Centre for the excellent tour and expertise.
- Morag, Manager, Families First St Andrews for her invaluable peer support, advice and laughs. Enjoy your well-earned retirement!

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/>

"LINK fills a gap in society. Helping teenagers reconnect with society, school, develop helpful social skills and the confidence to put them to use. LINK equips teenagers with skills they can use for the rest of their lives."