

LINK

East Fife Mental Health Adolescent Befriending Project

Annual Report 2025 - 2026

"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: Alison Clissold – Volunteer (left March 2026)
Member: Jacqueline Goodall - CAMHS
Member: Carole Anderson – volunteer
Member: Immaculate Nabyoto – volunteer (joined March 2026)
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 education.

“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.”

MANAGER'S REPORT

Welcome to the Adolescent Project's 24th AGM. Along with the ongoing challenges being faced throughout the Voluntary Sector, there were internal changes at the Adolescent Project. Maria moved on in September and Sue came into post early December. Instantly becoming another asset to LINK's wee, but mighty, staff team. Welcome to the Central Fife Co-ordinator role and thank you for fitting in so seamlessly.

Fundraiser Susan's work really started to reap rewards. The Project has much healthier reserves, giving additional security to the service's financial future. Staff continue to manage bigger funding bids. I was delighted my Children in Need application was successful. This was a lengthy, in-depth, highly competitive process, with only 1 in 6 being funded.

Volunteer recruitment continues to be tricky. A significant increase in referrals has led to lengthier waiting lists and times. **The Year in Numbers:**

- 22 volunteers have befriended 24 young people – **same** as 2024-25
- 1 new Trustee – welcome Immaculate; 5 newly trained befrienders, a **29% fall**
- 38 referrals, **up 63%**
- 4 Saltire and 6 Over 25s volunteering hours certificates have been presented, plus 3 Star Awards – congratulations Gyasiwa, Kathryn and Emma.

Social Events – Cluny Activity Centre, playing Fife themed mini-golf; Summer Soiree at Craigtoun Park; ProBowl Glenrothes and Christmas meal at The Rule, St Andrews. With up to 25 attendees, these events open up new experiences for both the young people and volunteers, in a safe and supported way, with peer friendships flourishing. And lots of fun being had!

I was delighted to be offered the chance of a free place on a Wave Project surfing therapy programme in St Andrews. The highly anxious and isolated young person has thrived through this joint working approach. Resulting in significant improvements in her wellbeing, confidence and social skills.

Befriender Emma won the Outstanding Contribution from a University Student at the Herald Higher Education Awards 2025. She was also an outstanding LINK volunteer for four years.

St Andrews University student Mahak did a short term placement with the whole charity, carrying out a great refresh of the website and producing a library of social media resources.

Thank you to all our amazing befrienders and trustees, we couldn't change young people's lives it without you

Jane Maciver, Adolescent Project Manager, 31.3.2026

CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

This has been a transitional year for the Central Fife project. Maria Suttie left the Co-ordinator role in September 2025, and I began work at the start of December. During the inevitable gap between Co-ordinators, Jane took up the reins, ensuring that the volunteers and young people were supported and matches continued smoothly. I am grateful for the welcome and support I received from Jane, the rest of the staff team and the Committee, helping me get to grips with what has been a busy first few months in the job. I have really enjoyed getting to know the dedicated group of volunteers who have such a positive impact on their befriendees, and learning about the challenges faced by the young people we support.

Some numbers for the year:

- 4 new volunteers trained
- 10 matches
- 10 new referrals
- 17 volunteers
- Referring agencies: CAMHS, GP, Occupational Therapy, Social Services

Referrals have continued to come in from all areas of Central Fife, and one of the challenges has been matching volunteers with referrals when geographical distances / transport issues make this tricky. Targeted volunteer recruitment in certain areas may help. Activities enjoyed by matches during the year have included walks, gardening, cinema, outdoor sketching and farm visits. Group social events began with Mini Golf in April, followed by summer fun at Craigtoun Country Park, Bowling in Glenrothes and a festive meal in St Andrews.

Above all, what our volunteers provide is their time and their support, and often accompanying a young person for a walk, or having a chat over food, is exactly what's needed in that moment. As someone said at an event I attended recently, we need our volunteers to be 'human beings', not just 'human doings'. Being authentically yourself, alongside a young person as they grow in confidence, can bring such positive impacts for both parties. Thank you to all our wonderful volunteers for giving their time to make a difference.

Sue Proudlove, Project Co-ordinator 31/03/2026

SOCIAL EVENTS

Spring: Cluny Clays

During the Easter holidays we went to Cluny Activity Centre and played some mini-golf, which is themed around the history of Fife, featuring some well-known landmarks and a singing tree much to everyone's amusement. We followed this up with some para-cording craft and a light-bite to eat. As usual, great company and fun was had.



Summer: Craigtoun Park



The 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 befriender and get some advice."

Autumn: ProBowl Glenrothes

18 intrepid bowlers at Tenpin 29 October. Another night of strikes, spares, misses, fun, food and friendships.



Christmas: Meal at The Rule, St Andrews

25 folk enjoyed great food, crackers and there was such a festive attire turnout had to take two photos as couldn't fit everyone into one!



"Having a befriender really helped me to gain my confidence back and helped me to enjoy going out and doing activities again"

VOLUNTEERS

**9 newly trained
volunteers**

**48 volunteers
involved**

**includes 9 trustees*

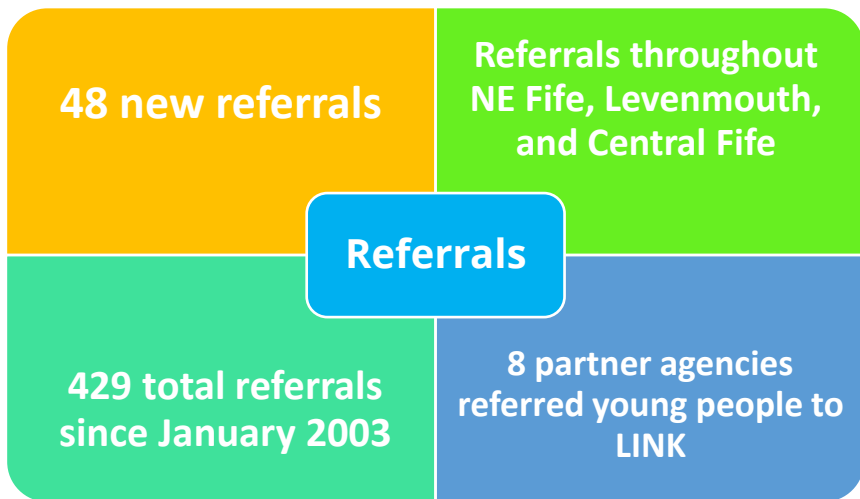
**So far 18 young people
have transitioned to
befrienders**

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

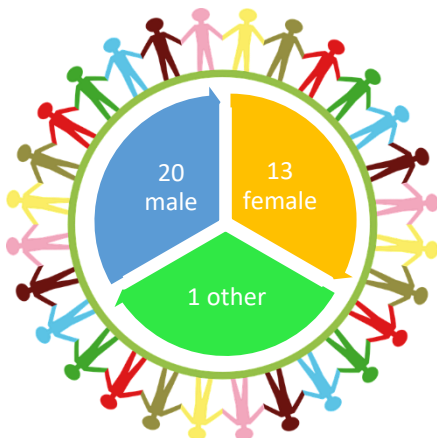
**39 volunteers have
befriended 34 young
people**

4 Saltire Awards and **7** over 25's certificates have been awarded to volunteers recognising their befriending time commitment.
3 volunteers have received Star Befriender Badge.

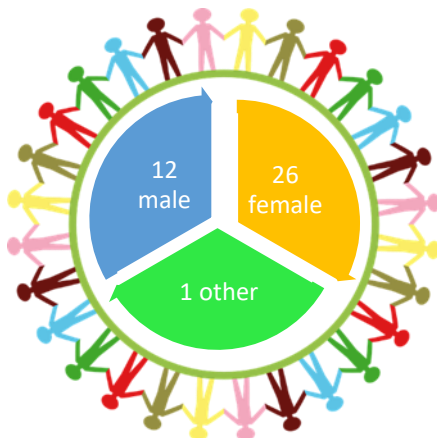




Young People



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 yous to their volunteers



Volunteers' Week was celebrated on 2nd to 8th June, thanking volunteers for their commitment to befriending throughout the year.

Befriending Spotlights



Having fun canoeing on Loch Leven, along with one of the befriender's dogs.

Young person enjoying hands-on fun at Kirkcaldy Galleries after their first ever train journey.



A match meeting over milkshakes.

YOUNG PERSON's (who became a befriender) STORY

I was referred to LINK as a teenager with problems 'fitting in' and interacting with others. I was self-harming, school had fallen apart and I was heading in a bad direction. Little did I know that I was about to meet a shining supernova called Jane, who played a big part in the years that would follow and indeed still helps me now, many tough years later.

I was matched with a befriender who was young and with whom I could easily relate. He provided me with an outlet who was not an authority, a family member or required to be there. He was just a guy who had gone through his own experiences. He gave me a chance to get a break from my problems and talk about them freely. Being with him gave me a regular break from the cage that I felt I was trapped in.

My befriender was a very outdoorsy person who encouraged me to get out and about. At the time I was very introverted and spent most of my day in my bedroom so the change to getting out and about in his company was ideal for me. Sometimes we would go to Tentsmuir and go for a walk or drive his remote control buggy, other times we would just go for a drive. I never felt the need to go to events or attractions; his company was what gave me that respite. The best moment we had was sitting by the harbour in Anstruther with fish and chips, just chatting about random things. My befriender didn't care what I had done, what was wrong with me or how alien I felt - he just spoke to me like a human being.

My relationship with my befriender and the impact it had on me inspired me to become a befriender myself. The first person that I met was a young man whose experiences seemed to cause him the same sense of isolation that I had, so I felt that I could relate to him, like my befriender before me I tried to keep things outdoors and relaxed.

My second match was a young man who had some history that matched aspects of my own and so again I felt that I could relate easily to him. He also seemed very lost in the world and was going down a bad path. My intentions were not to tell him 'This is wrong' or 'You shouldn't be doing that', I simply tried to be somebody that he could be honest with. I made it clear to him that unless I felt he was in danger everything that he said to me was confidential

and slowly but surely, he began to open-up. In response, I gave him honest advice though I was careful to never make it sound like I was telling him what to do. I tried my best to help him see the consequences of where he was going.

In my time with LINK as both befriender and befriendee I attended a few social events. These were great as I was able catch up with people that I had met previously and could see the progress that they, and myself, had made years later.

Since then I have gained a degree in biomedical science. During which I completed internships carrying out some research on cancer immunotherapies CRUK The Beatson Institute, Glasgow. Plus with CRUK at The Babraham Institute, Cambridge. I'm studying for a PhD at The University of Glasgow. Once that is complete hopefully I'll win four Nobel prizes for my work in cancer immunology research, although I guess I would settle for one. Or would I? I think that my experiences with LINK, in conjunction with the other help that I was lucky enough to receive as a teenager, has made me a stronger person and honestly, why restrict myself to one? I feel like I could do anything!

A Parent - *I was delighted when LINK were able to offer my son support and appreciated the care they took in making sure the young person and the befriender are a good match for each other. There's been such a change in my son since he started being supported by the project, he's really learnt to be reflective about things.*

Having experienced broken relationships in his life, the befriending service offers my son a safe space and a reliable and consistent person who can support him. The befriending has given him that safe adult and safe boundaries and a move away from the chaos of other situations. It has made such a difference and continues to make a difference.

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."

"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 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."

"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 befriender, but from meeting and chatting to others at social events. I have also made an amazing friendship with my befriender, which I didn't expect when starting out volunteering!"

"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."

"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 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

- BBC Children in Need £90,000, 2026 - 2028
- Young Start, Community Fund, ends May 26
- Alfred Dunhill Links Foundation £20,000
- Bank of Scotland Foundation £20,000
- Fife Health Charity £4,400
- Fife Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund £2,500
- Kirkcaldy WRRAP £1,400
- St Andrews and Kilrymont Rotary Clubs
- R&A Golf Club
- Tesco Stronger Starts end of grant 25% final payment
- Volunteers Allan & Ron who donated their expenses
- Many marvellous Trusts - W M Mann Foundation, Cordis Charitable Trust, Dr Guthrie's Association, Hugh Fraser Foundation, The Gertrude Pattullo Trust, The Alchemy Foundation, Lady Marian Gibson, Walter Craig Charitable Trust, Walker-Shoolbraid CT, Leach Family Trust, Hugh Stenhouse Foundation, ECHT, Conundrum Trust, Mary B Bannerman Trust, Hedley Foundation, The Meikle Foundation, Asda Foundation, Ward Family Trust.



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 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 and Ron for donating their volunteer expenses.
- Ceres Inn; Penman Butchers; New Forest Fruit Co Ltd; St Andrews Morrisons, Tesco & Sainsburys for all their generous summer soiree donations.
- Cluny Activities and ProBowl for facilitating our visits. Plus staff at The Rule for their fabulous festive service and food.
- Wonderful Derek at The Wave Project
- Mahak for her website and social media work
- 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.
- St Bryce Centre and St John's and Dairsie Church for room hire and staff support.
- Sue would like to thank Jane, Senga, Becky and all the Management Committee for their warm welcome to team LINK, and for their patience as she learns the ropes!

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."