



Stepping Stones



Year One Progress Update Summary

September 2018 - August 2019

“I feel like we’ve changed my life together”

**8 Youth Work
Organisations**

**208 Young
People**

**380 Group
Sessions**

**568 1:1
Sessions**

**16 Staff
Members**

**59 People
Working
Towards
Awards**

**58
Volunteers**

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Introduction

Stepping Stones has been developed by the Scottish Borders Youth Work Partnership, which brings together seven youth work organisations from across the Scottish Borders, together with YouthBorders. The seven organisations are: Beyond Earlston, Cheviot Youth, Connect Berwickshire Youth Project, Escape Youth Services, Rowlands, TD1 Youth Hub and Tweeddale Youth Action.

This report is a summary of Stepping Stones year one annual impact report which was prepared for the National Lottery Community Fund. This summary includes background information on the project, a summary of year one's main achievements, strengths and key highlights, as well as a conclusion and next steps for year two.

Background: What is Stepping Stones?

Stepping Stones is a three-year project, funded by National Lottery Community Fund, with big ambitions to improve the emotional health and wellbeing of targeted young people across the Scottish Borders within a universal youth work setting. The project is designed to make a step change in the way opportunities and support are given to improve the lives of young people. The desired long-term impacts of the project are:

1. To improve young people's **emotional health and wellbeing**, leading to greater resilience, increased confidence, higher levels of self-esteem and greater capacity to cope with life's challenges.
2. To increase **participation and engagement** of young people, who have been identified by ourselves and through partners as the most vulnerable and disengaged, in their communities where they live, learn and play.
3. To better equip young people to **deal with risky behaviours** which impact on their future life chances e.g. drugs, alcohol and sexual health.
4. To improve targeted services and activities through **greater collaboration** with new and existing partners.

The Stepping Stones project works alongside schools, social work and other youth and community-based organisations to ensure support is focused on those identified as the most vulnerable and the work delivered is joined up, effective and built on trust and reputation. Working in their local communities, the team of seven youth project workers support young people based on their needs, offering dedicated one-to-one support, targeted group work sessions and tailored activities. The project also supports joint activities, bringing together young people from across the region.

Each young person follows a similar path through the Stepping Stones project. Project workers used baseline and follow-up questionnaires to collect and record data from young people during one-to-one sessions. This was followed by a support plan, which was developed by and for each young person. Throughout year one, the project coordinator was successful in monitoring and evaluating the delivery of the project's outcomes, based on the data collected by the project workers. Feedback from youth project workers and young people has been recorded and regular reports were produced for the Partnership and the YouthBorders' board.

Who Takes Part?

Young people who are eligible for the project have been identified as "the most vulnerable and disengaged in their communities". Specifically, those coming from areas of deprivation, at risk of becoming involved in risk-taking behaviours such as drugs, alcohol and sexual health, those with additional support or behavioural needs, disabilities, mental health issues, low or non-school or college attenders, and those showing a general lack of attainment and engagement. The assessment of need and eligibility is through young people's self-identification and project worker's/partner organisation's professional judgement. Young people choose to take part.

How Many People Took Part?

In year one, a total of 208 young people, 16 staff members and 58 volunteers have been directly involved in Stepping Stones. In April 2019, the project coordinator started to monitor data provided for each young person. Since monitoring, 111 young people have signed up or have been carried forward for reporting purposes and 106 of these completed baseline questionnaires. Table 1 shows the eligibility criteria for participating in Stepping Stones and how many young people fall into each reason (some fall under more than one reason). Out of the 106 completed baseline questionnaires, 32 males, 58 females, 4 non-binary and 12 anonymous young people were involved (see table 2). Furthermore, the ages of young people in year one ranged between 9 and 19 years, with 12 years being the most common age (see figure 1). A total of 87 young people are expected to continue into year two of the project.

Table 1: The number of young people who fall under each participation reason since or carried forward to April 2019.

Participation Reason	Number of Young People
From an Area of Deprivation	12
Involved In or at Risk of Becoming Involved in Risk-Taking Behaviours	36
Additional Support/Behavioural Needs	20
Disability or Mental Health Issue	28
Low School Attendance or are a Non-School or College Attender	17
Underachieving at School/College	17
Disengaged in School	21
Other	32

Table 2: Number of males, females, non-binary and anonymous young people involved in Stepping Stones since or carried forward to April 2019.

Gender	Number of Young People
Males	32
Females	58
Non-binary	4
Anonymous	12
Total	106

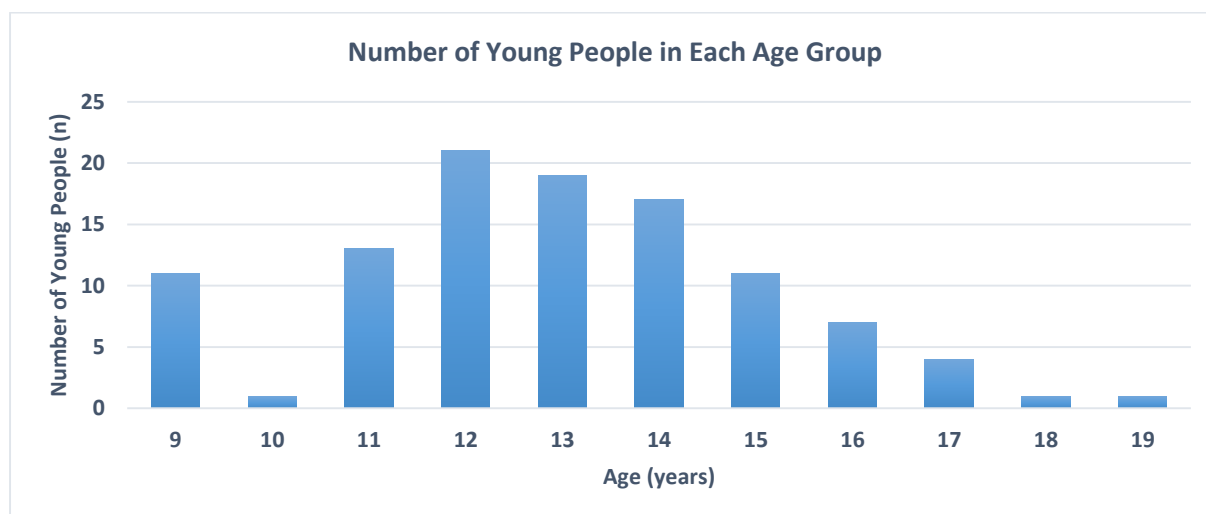


Figure 1: Number of Stepping Stones young people in each age group since or carried forward to April 2019.

Achievements in Year One

Governance

As with any new project, Stepping Stones has experienced a number of challenges and obstacles during the first year. However, working as a partnership, we have established a governance structure, project delivery mechanism and evaluation framework to support the project to make impact. We have been successful in:

- ✓ Establishing a Strategic Partnership Group to manage the governance and project overall.
- ✓ Establishing a Monitoring and Evaluation Group (MESG) to oversee the monitoring and evaluation of the Stepping Stones and invite partners, stakeholders, young people.
- ✓ Recruiting seven project workers for each organisation and a project coordinator at YouthBorders.
- ✓ Developing a Stepping Stones evaluation framework and logic model informed by the National Youth Work Outcomes and 'How Good is Our Third Sector Organisation' with input from the MESG and YouthLink Scotland (appendix 1).
- ✓ Creating a paper based evaluation toolkit allowing project workers to successfully evaluate impact and progress.
- ✓ Creating an excel based database to record statistics and evaluation data from the project.
- ✓ Setting up online communication channels, sharing information and documents between managers and trustees.
- ✓ Making progress against the project impacts and outcomes, which has been tracked and reported monthly to YouthBorders Board (as lead organisation) and quarterly to the Strategic Partnership Group.

Activity Highlights:

One-to-One Sessions

Throughout year one, project workers have provided **568 one-to-one sessions**, supporting Stepping Stones young people. These sessions have been key to building rapport with the young people, identifying areas for support and monitoring their journeys throughout their time on the project. Stepping Stones young people said:

"I like having someone who supports me to make things better. I like how it's personal and we can focus on me. I think having somewhere I can talk about things that are worrying me makes me worry less".

"I've been so lucky to be a part of Stepping Stones. It's changed me, first small things like self-esteem and self-worth and remembering that life can be enjoyable. Supporting me to get medication and counselling, supporting me in my personal development, introducing me to volunteering opportunities and always cheering me on and picking me up when I fell. Initially it felt really full on, I needed that though. I wasn't used to being a part of life really, that's a big shock!".

Group Work Sessions

In total, **380 group sessions** have taken place over the year. For example, Connect Berwickshire run a weekly Tech Café, where young people bake, cook and prepare the café to serve customers. Young people also support the elderly with any technical issues they have on their iPads, laptops and mobile phones. The young people involved are working towards their Dynamic Youth Award and being recognised by Saltire for their volunteering hours. Beyond Earlston coordinated a Garden Group where young people helped to dig, clear and plant flowers, fruit and vegetables in the community gardens of Earlston High School.

Rowlands Selkirk run a Relationships and Resilience Girls Group and Confidence and Communication Boys Group, which was introduced to Stepping Stones by Selkirk High School after having issues developing and

maintaining friendships and managing difficult relationships. Sessions are successful in building confidence in young people as they flourish relationships and become more empathetic towards one another. TD1 Youth Hub coordinated primary 6 and 7 Transition Groups - supporting those who are struggling with the move to secondary school.

Cheviot Youth organised a summer programme where young people took part in a number of trips and activities including Dynamic earth in Edinburgh and Harestanes Countryside visitor centre. Young people were also involved in a sports day, first aid course delivered by an ex-military officer and mountain biking at the Angraflats biking course in Kelso.

Furthermore, Tweeddale Youth Action run a Young Women's Group addressing barriers to opportunity, education, sex stereotyping and its impacts, body image, sexual health and LGBTQI+ inputs. Similarly, Escape Youth Services hold group talks on LGBTQI+ topics, sexual health, healthy eating, social media safety, and bullying amongst other issues as directed by the young people. One young person stated:

"Stepping Stones was a really positive experience for me, it helped me value myself and be a part of something. I've got a better more positive social life. I think I take care of myself much better. Women's Group has been great, to have a place where everyone can be honest. You don't realise what's going on for other people at all. That's been really good. I liked being able to choose things to do".

Drop-In and Social Sessions

Partner organisations run universal weekly drop-in youth club sessions where young people collaborate, participate in group activities and learn about relevant topics of interest. Stepping Stones enables young people to grow their social networks by encouraging participation in regular drop-ins and other projects within the youth work organisation. Project workers state that these social sessions are invaluable as it enables them to gain a better understanding of the young people and their interests; which facilitates engagement and strengthens relationships. This was summarised by a project worker:

"This is where a lot of our issue work comes to the forefront and I really get to know the Stepping Stones young people on a different level".

Social, Sporting and Creative Activities

Project workers provide activities that are specifically based on the desires and interests of Stepping Stones young people. Year one has been jam-packed with a variety of enjoyable social, sporting and creative activities such as pottery workshops, boxercise classes, canoeing, sponsored pyjama walk, silly sports, sports day, Edinburgh Zoo, Edinburgh Festival, outdoor laser tag, sailing trips, theme park, Strawberries and Sledging, Youth Scotland Big Ideas Weekend, Co-op Confidence Building Group, Borders Pet Rescue Animal Project Group, Wild Works, mountain biking and a Cosy Café. A young person said:

"It helps me feel like I belong somewhere. It's helped me mentally by letting me talk and by supporting me to do things that I would never have done before. I'm helping to organise a visit to our local alpaca's. We might invite people from another youth club. I don't think I'd have done that before. I preferred things to be how they'd always been. I don't want that anymore".

Making an Impact

When a young person leaves the project, they work with their project worker to provide a case study outlining their journey. Such case studies give an insight into how Stepping Stones is already changing lives for young people across the Scottish Borders. These also reflect the outcomes present in the logic model we established in the early stages of the project (appendix 1). Some extracts of case studies from year one have been included under each of the Stepping Stones four desired impacts.

Impact 1: Young people's emotional health and wellbeing has improved

One Stepping Stones participant was struggling at school and found it difficult to concentrate. The project worker wanted to try and focus their energy towards something positive. During their first one-to-one session, the young person shared an interest in special effects makeup. Since then, they have been able, with support, to produce a portfolio of work, make a video tutorial showing others how to get involved, and create an Instagram account to present images of the work they have achieved. The young person is continuing to do make-up in their own time. The project worker said,

"Her level of focus and commitment with this is astounding. You can really see the difference this is making to her self-worth and her confidence."

Impact 2: Participation and engagement of young people is increased within their communities

One young person came on board with Stepping Stones as they were extremely disengaged and had a low attendance record at school. The project worker contacted the young person and their mum to organise a meeting to discuss whether they would be interested in getting involved in the project. Since then, the young person has been involved in the café, tried cooking, using the devices and identifying potential questions they might get asked by customers. The project worker stated:

"The first day was a great success, our young person made plain scones and did a really good job of setting up the cafe, and although nervous he got right in there and worked with the clients".

One of the customers commented:

"As a 76 year-old, I am so easily confused about computing. [Young Person] helped me to understand how to import and manipulate photographic images using Mac Pages. He helped me to succeed and remember straightforward procedures that I had forgotten. He was patient, understanding and easy to get on with. When he introduced himself he said, 'I am better with old people than people my own age!'. The honesty and frankness of youth!"

The young person was so proud of the comments, they shared them with customers and others in the youth group. Within weeks, the young person was back attending school and their guidance teacher said:

"There has been a definite increase in attendance and especially his attitude in school over the weeks".

Impact 3: Young people are better equipped to deal with risky behaviours which impact on their future life chances

A small group of young people on the project had issues with risk taking behaviours such as drugs and alcohol. The project worker carried out several group work sessions and tackled their crucial issues. Young people within the group have since reduced their drug and alcohol misuse and have begun to reflect and consider their lifestyle choices. It is evident that the group have increased their confidence as a result of the Stepping Stones project.

One young person in particular was extremely quiet and had no confidence when they joined the project. They

are now working with the public, which they previously would never have considered. Another young person feels less anxious as a result of the sessions and has enrolled on a driving theory course, which again, would not have had the confidence to do before. One young person stated:

“Drinking and smoking weed can increase my anxiety. I have become more confident”.

Impact 4: Targeted services and activities are improved through greater collaboration between partners

Each partner has worked collaboratively with local stakeholders and other organisations to introduce young people to Stepping Stones or to create opportunities which further the young people’s interests or needs. Since July 2019, we have grown opportunities internally for collaboration between project partners by bringing together two or more Stepping Stones groups/young people to take part in ‘new challenging opportunities’. This approach has already proved highly successful with a number of activities taken place, with young people meeting peers from other areas of the Borders for the first time:

- Connect Berwickshire and Rowlands have been on a cinema trip followed by lunch at Rowlands community café.
- Connect Berwickshire, Beyond Earlston and Rowlands Selkirk went on a trip to Dunbar, where young people had the opportunity to go swimming and they also attended events during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.
- Beyond Earlston and Rowlands Selkirk have taken part in a joint canoeing adventure and a trip to Whithaugh Park.

The project workers have reflected on these initial joint opportunities:

“This joined up working has been a long time coming and would never have happened in this way for these young people if not for the Stepping Stones Project”.

“Young people made instant connections with a young person from each of the youth projects, I was so happy to see how confident and open they were meeting new people and in a different place”.

Reflections on Year One

Stepping Stones was created to support the most vulnerable and disengaged young people in our youth work communities. It is our reflection of year one that the level and complexity of need amongst young people is greater than we had anticipated when the project idea was conceived. Project workers are routinely supporting young people experiencing issues such as self-harm, suicidal thoughts, teenage pregnancy and domestic abuse. When required, referrals were made to statutory or other third sector partners. We are committed that in year two we invest further in our staff team to ensure that they have access to specialist training and have regular outlets for peer support and professional supervision in order to provide high quality support to young people. One project worker said:

“Through Stepping Stones, this Young Person was able to open up about the abuse they were experiencing at home. She didn’t know what her options were and had a plan in place to commit suicide. She didn’t want to but felt there was no other option. She is now safely out of the family home, and under the support of social work”.

Moreover, this is the first opportunity that the Youth Work Partnership has had for shared project delivery and a common outcomes framework: the learning from this has been invaluable to the maturity of the Partnership. It has provided opportunity for sharing of culture and practices between project workers and youth work managers in seven youth work organisations. Stepping Stones has required the project partnership to make multiple and often complex decisions at regular intervals, sometimes of an operational nature and sometimes strategic. This has required the partners to consider how we make and reach decisions, with a consensus approach being most frequently utilised. We continue to learn from one another through reflective approaches to decision-making and the assessment of risk and opportunities for the project.

Conclusion

As a partnership we have accomplished many achievements and successes in the first year of our Stepping Stones project: from recruiting seven project workers, to working together to establish a governance structure, project delivery mechanism and evaluation framework to support the project. The data gathered from questionnaires in year one clearly demonstrates the positive impact that Stepping Stones has already made on young people - whether it be supporting them to make better choices, to believe in themselves, to support one another, and to have a trusted space to share their problems.

Indications from our first year case studies show progress towards our project impacts: of improving young people's **emotional health and wellbeing**, increasing **participation and engagement**, better equipping young people to **deal with risky behaviours** and improving targeted services and activities through **greater collaboration**.

Moving Forward into Year Two:

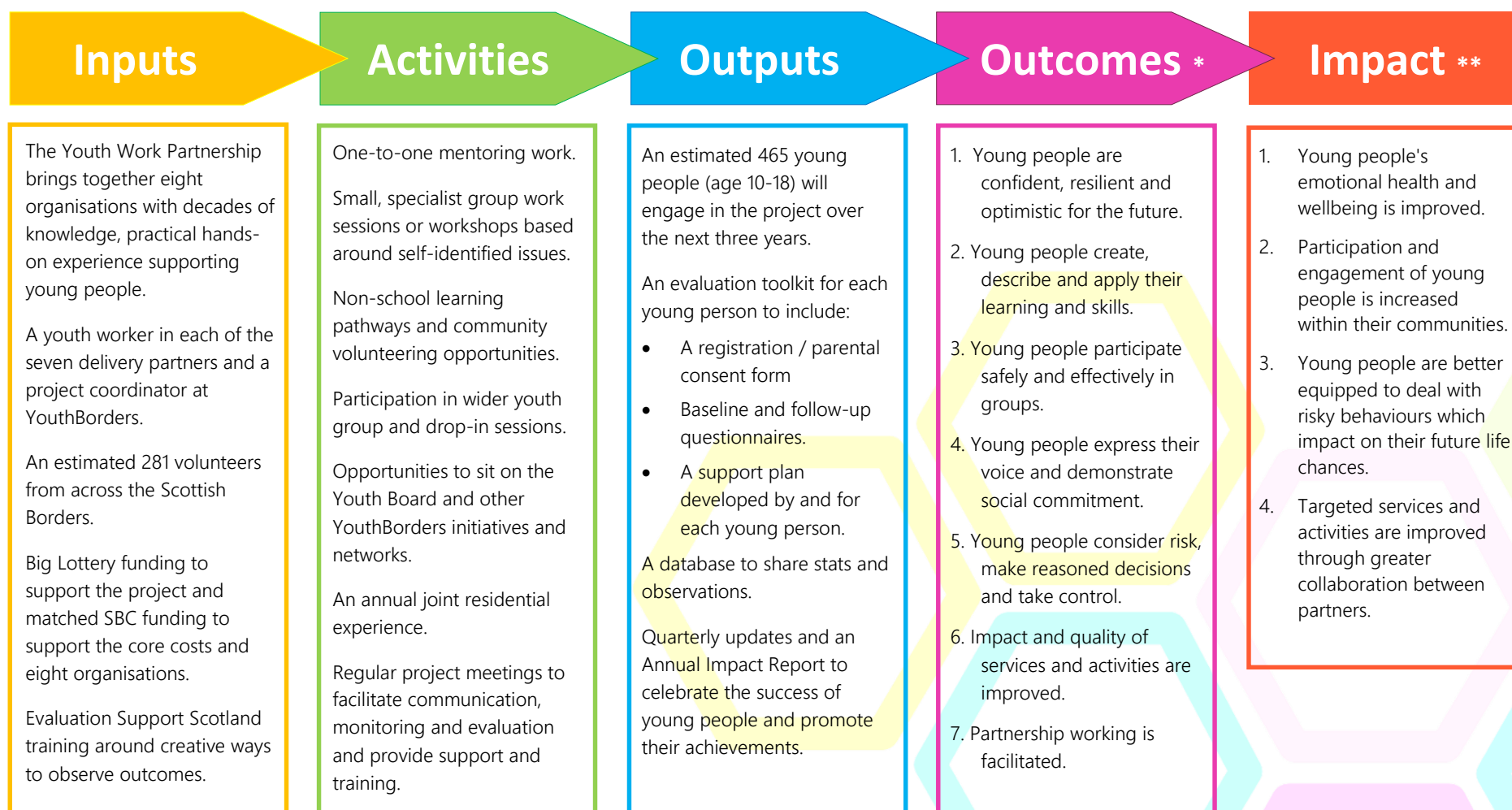
- We will continue in our commitment to develop and improve the project with the shared intention of achieving impact.
- We will continue to meet the needs of Stepping Stones young people and adapt what we are doing accordingly to ensure we provide opportunities where young people are confident, resilient and optimistic for the future.
- We will create greater opportunities for collaboration and joint working between the 8 organisations within the Partnership.
- We will work to further young people's involvement in the design and evaluation of Stepping Stones, whilst continuing to support young people to be engaged within their youth organisations and communities.
- We will implement a new online database which will replace the excel based system, allowing for better analysis of outcomes and impacts of the Stepping Stones project.
- We will increase opportunities for the Stepping Stones staff team to access training and peer support to grow their youth work practice.

For further information about Stepping Stones and the Scottish Borders Youth Work Partnership please contact Carly McAllan, Stepping Stones Project Coordinator at YouthBorders.

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Appendix 1: Stepping Stones Logic Model

Stepping Stones is a three-year project developed by the Scottish Borders' Youth Work Partnership and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. A unique approach to collaborative working across the youth sector, the project is designed to change the way opportunities and support are offered to young people, allowing for greater added value through the sharing of ideas and best practice as well as budgets, resources, expertise and knowledge.



IMPACT ONE: To improve young people's emotional health and wellbeing leading to greater resilience, confidence, self-esteem and capacity to cope with life's challenges.		IMPACT TWO: To increase participation and engagement of young people in their communities where they live, learn and play.		IMPACT THREE: To better equip young people to deal with risky behaviours which impact on their future life chances.		IMPACT FOUR: To improve targeted services and activities through greater collaboration with new and existing partners.		
OUTCOME	INDICATOR	OUTCOME	INDICATOR	OUTCOME	INDICATOR	OUTCOME	INDICATOR	
1. Young people are confident, resilient and optimistic for the future.	1.1. Young people participate in youth work when it is difficult for them to do so.	3. Young people participate safely and effectively in groups.	3.1. Young people recognise the policies and practice which keep them safe.	5. Young people consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control.	5.1. Young people can explain the consequences of harmful behaviour on themselves and on others.	6. We secure improvement of quality and impact of services.	6.1. We effectively gather feedback from young people, partners and other stakeholders.	
	1.2. Young people report an increase in confidence.		3.2. Young people resolve conflict peacefully within relationships.		5.2. Young people often make informed choices.		6.2. We evaluate and plan for improvement.	
	1.3. When faced with a problem, young people come up with a solution.		3.3. Young people work with others on group tasks.				6.3. We report progress to stakeholders.	
2. Young people create, describe and apply their learning and skills.	2.1. Young people plan their own learning outcomes.	4. Young people express their voice and demonstrate social commitment.	4.1. Young people express their point of view and are listened to.		5.3. Young people take responsibility for their actions.		7. We facilitate partnership working.	7.1. We have clear aims, roles and responsibilities within the partnership.
	2.2. Young people gain accreditation or recognition of their achievements.		4.2. Young people volunteer.					7.2. We share skills, knowledge and experience across partners to improve outcomes.
	2.3. Young people use their learning and skills in different settings.		4.3. Young people feel part of their community.					7.3. We plan and evaluate jointly to add value.

The Youth Work Partnership is a close collaboration of eight youth work charities from across the Scottish Borders: Beyond Earliston; Cheviot Youth; Connect Berwickshire Youth Project; Escape Youth Services; Rowland's Selkirk; TD1 Youth Hub; Tweeddale Youth Action and YouthBorders.