



Stepping Stones

Year 2 Impact Report

September 2019 – August 2020

"This project gave me hope. [Project Worker] believed in me, always. We all need a cheerleader at times to remind us we are worthy and capable".



November 2020

Dedication - in memory of Katie Hibbert

The Youth Work Partnership were deeply saddened by the sudden passing of Katie Hibbert, our Tweeddale Stepping Stones Project Worker in October 2019. Katie was an inspiring, committed and caring youth worker. She was ambitious for the young people she worked with which was seen in all aspects of her work. She was a fantastic colleague, who was bright and hilariously funny. Our Partnership and the young people of Tweeddale lost an excellent youth worker, and we dedicate the continued work of Stepping Stones to Katie's memory.

Background

What is Stepping Stones?

Stepping Stones is a three-year project developed and delivered by the Scottish Borders Youth Work Partnership and is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. The project, coordinated by YouthBorders, creates a partnership of seven locality youth work organisations from across the region. The seven delivery partners are; Beyond Earlston, Cheviot Youth, Rowland's (Selkirk), Escape Youth Services, Connect Berwickshire Youth Project, TD1 Youth Hub and Tweeddale Youth Action.

Stepping Stones has 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.**

Stepping Stones 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.

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.

This report is a summary of Stepping Stones year two annual impact report which was prepared for the National Lottery Community Fund in October 2020. Year 2 is activity from September 2019 to August 2020.

Facts and Figures: Stepping Stones Year Two

- ✓ **134 young people** received youth work support from Stepping Stones in year two, supporting their emotional health and wellbeing. This included 69 males and 65 females.
- ✓ The age of young people on Stepping Stones ranges between 9 and 21, with **14 years old** being the most common age.
- ✓ 87 new young people joined Stepping Stones and **96 young people have completed the project in year two**, with many moving on to opportunities within the mainstream offer of the youth project.
- ✓ **102 young people** are expected to continue into year 3 of the project.
- ✓ The three most frequent **reasons for joining** Stepping Stones this year were;
 - 'Lacking Confidence',
 - 'Additional Support/Behavioural Needs',
 - 'Disability or Mental Health Issue'.
- ✓ The three most frequent **outcomes achieved** by young people were;
 - 'Confidence',
 - 'Taking Responsibility',
 - 'Have a Voice'.
- ✓ Young people **consistently report positively** about their Stepping Stones relationship and support they receive from their Project Worker.
- ✓ Young people continued to be **supported during Covid-19** through online sessions, food packages, craft and activity kits, safe distanced home visits, outdoor meet ups, and latterly safe indoor met ups in line with youth work guidance.

What impact are we making?

The diversity of Stepping Stones means that it is creating positive impact in many different aspects of young people's lives. These are most readily identified as **making positive impact on young people's self-belief, confidence and ability to engage with services and support**. Overall we see positive improvement in the young people's relationships with others; their willingness and confidence to try something new; and demonstrating that they have the skills to cope and manage at times of change or uncertainty. This has included situations where young people have experienced difficulties at school, with housing, employment, income insecurity, family breakdown, grief, school transition, and poor mental health: anxiety, stress, depression and self-harm.

Over the first two years of Stepping Stones, Project Workers have worked with young people who are the most vulnerable and disengaged in their community. One-to-one support, targeted group work sessions and tailored activities have been focused on improving young people's emotional health and wellbeing, resilience and confidence.

In year two – feeling low in confidence was the main reason for young people joining Stepping Stones. Throughout year two, Project Workers have provided **1285 one-to-one sessions**, supporting Stepping Stones young people. These sessions have been key to building rapport with the young people and nurturing a trusted adult relationship for these young people. Young people identify areas for support and monitor their journeys throughout their time on the project. We collect this data at an individual level, however looking collectively the outcomes where most improvements were made were: 'Confidence', 'Taking Responsibility' and 'Having a Voice'. Young people's evidence tells us of a consistent impact on the young person's feeling of self-worth and value which is gained from having a positive and **trusted relationship** with their Project Worker.



In Year 2, Stepping Stones young people said:

"Thank you for all your support you have done for me. I wanted to take this time to say a huge thank you. I feel awful and grateful that you have put up with me and I feel like I can open up to you a lot more than anyone else. You have had to put up with loads of stuff and you have always had a way of overcoming it".

"It helped so much that you just listen without judgement. People don't understand how therapeutic it is to just rant, cry and talk without feeling like a loser".

"I needed someone who thought I can do better. Someone who understood my mental health isn't about attention seeking but a cry for help. I never felt embarrassed or judged to have a break down in front of [project worker]".

"I like being a part of Stepping Stones as its really good to talk to someone that talks to me like a human and not like I am stupid. You are always there to support me and I know I can always count on you".

"I think this project is extremely helpful and I want to do something like this in the future. We need more safe spaces and people who can relate and listen".

"I look forward to seeing [project worker], I know she tries to help me and we stay in touch".

"I like that I see the same person weekly and get to talk to her and go to new places".

"I have someone to talk to about my problems and stuff. It gives me someone to talk to when I'm worried or upset".

"This project helped improved so many different parts of my life - relationship with my family, understanding my health and mental health better, accepting help, understanding relationships better, finding a job I really wanted, cv, writing and interview skills and recognising toxic relationships."

Project Workers have also encouraged young people to participate in group sessions when it is difficult for them to do so and to have **increased engagement with their wider community**. This begins initially within the youth group in very small groups and over time can lead to joint activity or visits beyond the Borders. In total, **197 group work opportunities** have been provided in year two. Group work creates a positive impact on young people's inter-personal skills, their peer relationships, and feelings of achievement and value. The group sessions are excellent spaces for young people to learn new skills including cooking and tech/coding; but also to develop knowledge and understanding of health and risk-taking behaviours such as online safety, nutrition, sexual health, relationships and consent. Young people have gone on to represent their youth group at national youth events, and have had their horizons broadened by being supported to attend university open days and intercultural events.

At the start of year two, Cheviot Youth set up a Music Project Group after one young person suggested the idea. The young person wanted to arrange group meetings to plan, share ideas and discuss roles, themes and issue jobs. He then hoped to develop a track with music, singing, rapping and beatboxing, where everyone would have a part to play. The group decided on a theme of endangered animals and recruited the help of Sound-Cycle. They had a fantastic recording session, with percussion, keyboard and vocals and recorded some great content, which Sound-Cycle then produced into some exciting tracks.

Project Worker said: "One of the reasons that this project was a highlight for me, was being able to see what an impact it had on the young person. Having his idea taken seriously and pushed through with action clearly boosted his self-esteem and self-confidence. Not only did we have fun along the way, but we also learned lessons about creative teamwork, individuality and self-worth. It was great to see this young person engage in the new project and participate well in a group".

In March 2020, Rowland's made a trip to Bowden Village hall to celebrate International Women's Day with Stepping Stones young people. During this celebration, young people watched a documentary and listened to an interesting talk about a women's empowerment and education organisation called Seven Women Centre in Nepal. One young person was particularly looking forward to this trip as she has a real interest in cultural pursuits and educating herself about the world.

Young person said: "I really enjoyed the trip and learned a lot from it, especially how lucky I feel about my life and opportunities. I found it quite provoking but I found the women an inspiration and funny with their outlook and positivity on life. I was shocked that women as young as 13 were regularly involved in arranged marriages and that it wasn't uncommon for domestic abuse to take place".

Young people at TD1 Youth Hub planned and organised to volunteer at Stable Life as part of '12 months, 12 acts of kindness'. The young people had previously used Stable Life in the past and wanted to show their appreciation of the service and give something back so they helped to muck out the horses, sweep the yard and put away tools and equipment (figure 1 and 2). By doing this activity it allowed young people to consider risk, make reasoned choices and take control of the jobs they were given. Three of the young people completed a Dynamic Youth Award for this challenge.



Figure 1 and 2: TD1 young people volunteering at Stable Life.

Involvement in or at risk of becoming involved in **Risk-Taking Behaviours** was one of the two most frequent reasons for joining Stepping Stones in both years one and two. In year two, a Project Worker was able to provide life-changing support to an extremely vulnerable young person who was in crisis during lockdown. The young person experienced several issues which lead to self-harm, drug use and suicide attempts - leading to time in hospital. In year one, Project Workers engaged and intervened on issues including sexual health and emergency contraception. The Stepping Stones role in risk taking behaviour often involves multiple partners and supporting the young person to self-advocate and find their voice with parents, carers or other services. Supporting young people's mental health and the associated risk of poor mental health features in the lives and experiences of many of the Stepping Stones young people, with 54 young people in year two **experiencing poor mental health** as one of their reasons for joining Stepping Stones.

Joint Activity

One of the key ways in which collaboration is experienced by young people in the project is through 'joint activity'. The Youth Work Partnership took steps to increase joint activity for holiday programmes during the summer however, this was impacted by Covid-19. The group continues to seek opportunities for joint activity to bring young people together in year three. In year two, Beyond Earlston, and Rowlands worked together to create joint groups including Girls Group, Family Lockdown Cooking sessions (figure 3) and Mental Health Aware Digital Treasure Hunt. They also visited Friarshawmuir Farm (figure 4) and delivered 'No Strings Attached Bags' to young people.



Figure 3 and 4: Family lockdown cooking and trip to Fairshawmuir Farm joint activity.

Joint activity also enabled Project Workers to support young people to contribute to a regional YouthBorders competition about 'Life in Lockdown', with a Stepping Stones young person's poem being a celebrated winning entry. Moreover, Connect, Beyond Earlston and Rowlands joined together to deliver 'Strength in Numbers' which was a communal canvas project in partnership with Birkhill House which is now to be displayed at the Borders General Hospital (figure 5).

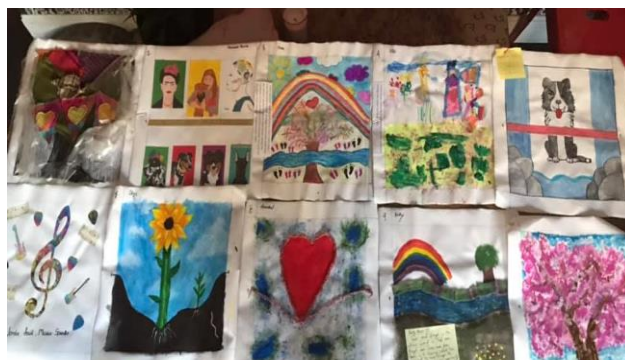


Figure 5: Canvases by Connect Berwickshire, Beyond Earlston and Rowlands young people.

Case Studies

When a young person leaves the project, they work with their Project Worker to develop 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 (see appendix 1) that we established in the early stages of the project. Some extracts of case studies have been included under the desired project impacts below.

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

Amy's Story

This young person first started their Stepping Stones journey in October 2018. She has had a lot going on in her life before and since then and her journey has been a rollercoaster. Over the months there has been issues such as self-harm, drug use and suicide attempts - leading to time in hospital. She is really struggling staying at home during lockdown as she does not get on well with her parents. The young person also has money issues and is learning to save.

During lockdown this young person has found it particularly difficult as she has been arguing with her parents and is unable to socialise with friends due to government restrictions. Although she could not see her Project Worker face to face, she found having 1:1 video calls with her Project Worker very supportive during this time.

The young person was eager to get involved in the 'Life in Lockdown competition' to have something to focus on. The Project Worker and young person worked together to write a poem which focused on the challenges and struggles that some young people will be experiencing during lockdown. The judges in the competition were very impressed with her work and appreciated the honesty of her poem. The young person was ecstatic to hear she had been awarded first prize (appendix 3). The Project Worker commented: "We started writing the poem and her contribution was incredible. She was really engaged and she was so proud of herself".

This encouragement boosted the young person's confidence and she soon got involved in other activities within her organisation such as the Canvas Project. She later decided she would like to complete a Dynamic Youth Award to go along with her hard work. The young person has recently started studying at college and continues to get support from her Project Worker. Young person said:

"I like that I can talk to you and not feel angry and you always know what to say. I like that you don't judge and want the best for me. I know that you can help me through college".

"I can talk to you. I feel cared for and listened to. I have somewhere to go".

"You and [youth worker] are helping me with my money problems and how to save money. I feel calmer after being at Youthy. I feel supported knowing I have someone to talk to that cares and somewhere to go I feel safe".

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

Ben's story

When this young person first joined the Stepping Stones project, he was disengaged and had been in trouble at school, the community and at Youth Club. This young person has ADHD and learning difficulties so can find it difficult to stay focused on activities. He was angry and felt very low the majority of the time and struggled to admit when he was wrong. He often fell out with friends and was very violent towards peers. He also struggled with his school work and said he never got the right support. He did not understand the importance of road safety and wearing a bike helmet.

The young person's first goal was to control his anger. He also wanted to become more empathetic and friendly towards people, which would help rebuild friendships. The Project Worker also wanted this young person to believe in themselves as he often said "I can't do that".

The young person attended 1:1 sessions and group sessions on an ad-hoc basis where he had the opportunity to discuss any issues he was experiencing. He started to volunteer in Youth Club and helped revamp the furniture (figure 6). He surpassed himself by volunteering at the Scottish Borders Walking Festival every evening for 5 nights where he washed the dishes. The chairperson and volunteer for this said he was "very conscientious" which is fantastic feedback to receive on his progress and they were very pleased with how he had worked and she saw a massive improvement on his attitude and behaviour. Additionally, the young person said he would make an effort to be more responsible and safe on the roads and look for his bike helmet.

This young person has had a great transformation and journey with Stepping Stones project. He won the Young Person of the Year 2019 and was really proud of this award (figure 8). This young person has made solid friendships and he has shown his kind and empathetic side by supporting them in troublesome times and offering advice when it is needed. He is also less likely to be involved in risk-taking behaviours. Young person said:

"I learn so much more here than I do all week and it's good to be able to give my view without being told it all the time. I am really enjoying these activities. It is nice to be part of something I am good at for a change and I am allowed to do and not always being in trouble".



Figure 6: Young person revamping furniture.

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

Zoe's Story

At the start of this young person's journey, she had a history of running away from school, difficulty maintaining friendships and did not engage or trust any adults. The young person recently started to engage in drinking sessions and smoked weed. When the Project Worker asked why she skipped school, the young person replied *"I don't have anywhere to go if I feel stressed and you aren't here"*.

During lockdown, this young person struggled with violent and abusive behaviour towards her parents. The Project Worker was able to continue supporting the young person and parents during this time by delivering cooking, art and craft deliveries as well as providing family support. This wasn't always well received by the young person but she positively acknowledged that her input was valid and listened to.

The young person took part in several youth work opportunities, such as online learning and she also gained some new skills through the British Horse Association and completed a Dynamic Youth Award. Although the young person struggles with anxiety in group situations and peer communication, she attended online group sessions regularly which was a fantastic achievement. The young person also worked on building relationships with her peers and they are now attending Stepping Stones group sessions together. This young person will continue to receive Stepping Stones support to meet her goals.

This young person's spider diagram (figure 7) shows that the majority of outcomes have increased from baseline to the review in March. The next review was taken in June and shows that outcomes for 'Confidence', 'Resilience', 'Participation' and ability to make 'Informed choices' have worsened as a result of lockdown. However, an increase in 'Service Feedback' and 'Having a Voice' highlights the importance of Stepping Stones during these uncertain times. This young person will continue to work with their Project Worker to meet their targets. Young person said: *"I find life at home and lockdown stressful. I thought it would be great being home but I'm so bored and hate being around everyone but thinking about going back to school isn't a great option either. I'm stuck"*.

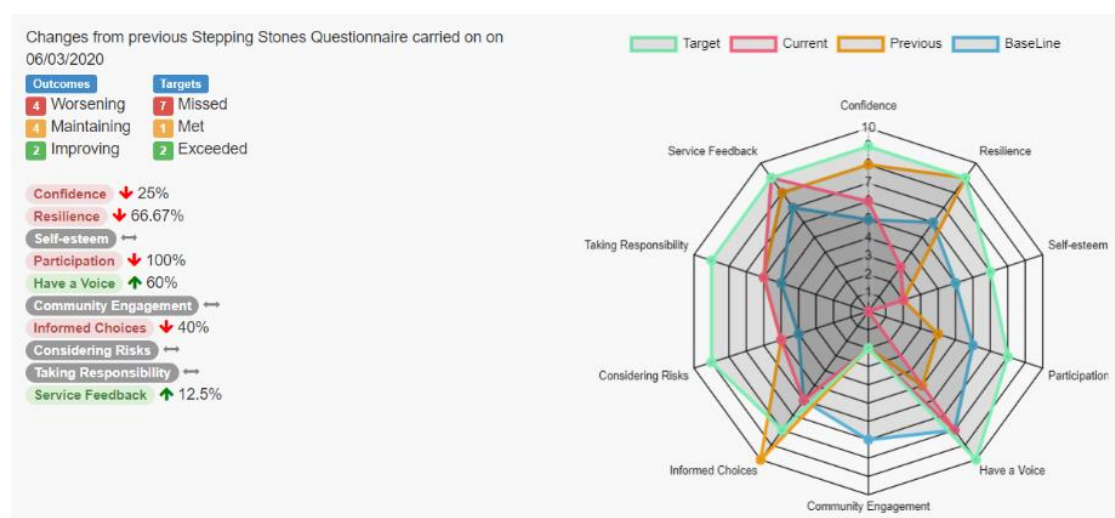


Figure 7: Young person's spider diagram results

Stepping Stones and Covid-19

Covid-19

In March 2020, the UK government imposed a lockdown to control the spread of the Covid-19. During lockdown, the Project Worker and young person's relationship was tested, as the nature of youth work delivery changed from face to face sessions to online and phone communication. Undoubtedly, young people continued to value the trusted relationship of their Project Worker; however, in many areas lockdown made it difficult to reach new young people to join the project. From this experience, youth organisations have had to quickly adapt their services to think more creatively to consider new ways of working to enable the continuation of sessions. Project Workers have used online video calls and experimented with weekly groups such as quizzes, games and cooking sessions, which were well received by young people through lockdown. One Project Worker commented, "This has resulted in greater accessibility to the service for young people, particularly for those suffering with social anxiety".

However, as predicted lockdown has also been very difficult for both young people and staff. Project Workers reported that they found difficulty in communicating and engaging some young people via phone and online during this period. They also missed the ability to observe body language to help interpret a young person's response.

Project Worker said: "Young people aren't as computer and media illiterate as we thought. Many young people struggle with tasks like web search, following instructions online or using unfamiliar programmes. Using social media and digital platforms needs to be an integral part in our support offer to prepare young people for the future".

The Covid-19 crisis has proven that youth workers and youth organisations can be partners in providing support to people's well-being, especially for vulnerable groups. Youth organisations were able to provide food packages, wellbeing packs and support to vulnerable families and young people that were in particular need during this time.

Working in partnership meant that managers and project workers from the 7 localities could meet virtually to share resources, knowledge and ideas as well as discussing and learning from individual caseloads. Covid-19 has increased our online and virtual engagement and has been a positive development in use of staff time, reducing the need for travel.

Looking Forward

Towards the future

Through YouthBorders, community based youth work organisations will continue to be connected and supported as they plan towards the future, ensuring that youth work continues to be available to young people across the Scottish Borders and that it responds to changes in restrictions and the needs of the young people in the community.

- The Stepping Stones project continues to work with the most disadvantaged young people who are experiencing a range of issues, many of which have been compounded by the impact Covid-19.
- 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 continue in our commitment to develop and improve the project with the shared intention of achieving impact.
- We will continue to 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 review personal planning and organisational review section on the database to identify which of our monitoring questions are core and which are supplementary – this will enable more flexibility in the frequency of reviews, being informed by the views and experiences of Project Workers and young people.
- Youth organisations will continue to keep some aspects of working remotely as certain meetings are easier to facilitate remotely and so have better attendance and consequently are less expensive of time and money.
- We will maintain our virtual meetings of the Youth Work Managers and Project Workers.
- Working alongside parents and families has many benefits and is something we want to continue in the year ahead.
- We will increase opportunities for further training for Project Workers, and support the induction of new Project Workers.



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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.

