

Stepping Stones

Phase 1 (2018-2021) Impact Report,
incorporating Year 3 (2020/21)
Highlights



Executive Summary

We received a National Lottery Award from The National Lottery Community Fund to continue to deliver **Stepping Stones** for a further three years until August 2024.

In year three, we have **supported 114 young people**, and **97 young people have completed Stepping Stones** in year three.

In year three, we have provided **961 one to one sessions**, **189 group sessions** and **9 joint activities**.

A total of **14 young people** have **successfully completed Youth Awards** this year.

84%
... of young people agree or strongly agree that their **confidence has increased** since being involved with Stepping Stones.

81%
... of young people agree or strongly agree that their **self-esteem has increased** since being involved with Stepping Stones.

87%
... of young people agree or strongly agree that they **can use their skills and experiences to better cope** when things in life are difficult or challenging.

90%
... of young people agree or strongly agree that they **know where to go to get access to trusted information** so that they can make informed choices and decisions about their future.

84%
... of young people agree or strongly agree that they have an **increased ability to express their point of view** to other people.

69%
... of young people agree or strongly agree that their involvement with Stepping Stones has **increased their ability to work well with other people** in a group.

79%
... of young people agree or strongly agree that they **consider the potential risks** before they make choices about where to go and what to do.

65%
... of young people agree or strongly agree that they have an **increased sense of belonging to their community** since being involved in Stepping Stones.

Background

Stepping Stones, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF), is a partnership youth work project that supports young people aged 10-18 in the Scottish Borders, with the aim of improving their emotional health and wellbeing, and life chances.

A team of seven Project Workers support young people based on their personal needs, helping them to achieve their full potential and to develop skills through non-formal education activities within a universal youth work setting. Stepping Stones is not time limited, allowing each young person to engage for as long as they need.

The four project impacts 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 project, coordinated by YouthBorders, is delivered by a partnership of seven locality youth work organisations from across the region. The seven delivery partners are; Beyond Earlston, Cheviot Youth, Rowland's, Escape Youth Services, Connect Berwickshire Youth Project, TD1 Youth Hub and Tweeddale Youth Action. Stepping Stones works alongside schools, social work and other youth organisations to ensure support is focused on those who need it most and that the work delivered is joined up, effective and built on trust and reputation.



Figure 1: Youth Work Partnership Locality Map.

This report is a summary of Stepping Stones Year Three and Phase One Impact report. This report includes the key highlights, statistics and evaluations from phase one, case studies, learning and reflections, and next steps for year four. **All names and identifiers have been changed in case-studies and quotes to anonymise the participants and beneficiaries.**

Phase One Key Statistics

Throughout phase one, we supported a total of **272 young people**. Around 50% of young people who were supported in year three will continue to receive support in year four. Project Workers delivered **2,814 one-to-one sessions**, **766 group sessions** and **17 joint activities** to young people throughout phase one. In years two and three, sessions were delivered both virtually and face-to-face due to Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. Furthermore, a total of **111 young people are either enrolled or have successfully achieved a Youth Achievement Award** over the past three years. The key statistics from years one, two and three are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1: Key statistics from phase one.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
No. of supported young people	111	134	114
No. of young people who exited the project	24	96	97
No. of one-to-one sessions	568	1285	961
No. of group sessions	380	197	189
No. of joint activities	0	8	9
No. of Youth Awards (enrolled and awarded)	59	25	27

Participation Reasons

In year one, the most frequent reasons for young people joining Stepping Stones was being 'involved in or at risk of becoming involved in risk-taking behaviours', followed by having a 'disability or mental health issue' and 'lacking confidence'. 'Lacking confidence' and 'additional support/behavioural needs' remained the top two reasons for joining the project in years two and three. It was observed that the closure of schools and youth organisations in response to the Covid-19 pandemic has had a major impact on young people as they had to significantly change the way they lived and learned. This explains the change in participation reasons in year three, as more young people have become 'disengaged in school' as a result of losing their normal school routine. Project Workers use this participation data to tailor their sessions to meet the needs of each young person.

Table 2: The top three reasons why young people joined Stepping Stones in years one, two and three.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Reason 1	Involvement in or at Risk of Becoming Involved in Risk-Taking Behaviours	Lacking Confidence	Lacking Confidence
Reason 2	Disability or Mental Health Issue'	Additional Support/Behavioural Needs	Additional Support/Behavioural Needs
Reason 3	Lacking Confidence	Disability or Mental Health Issue	Disengaged in School

Young People's Feedback and Reflections

"This project has helped me in so many ways. I have **gained so many new skills and confidence** that I didn't even know I had. It's so nice to have **someone believe in you**".

"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**".

"This project **helped me through difficult times**. Break up with my boyfriend, **fall outs** with friends and family **and my poor mental health**".

"This project helped improve so many **different parts of my life** – relationships with my family, understanding my **health and mental health better**, excepting help, finding a job I really wanted, **CV writing and interview skills** and recognising **toxic relationships**".

"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".

"Through Stepping Stones I am able to **participate in activities** I would probably not take part in. It is important for me to **challenge myself** and I can do that in an **environment I feel safe in**. I have had the chance to **make new friends and feel part of something and not feel so lonely**".

"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**".

"I like being part of Stepping Stones as it's really good for me 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**".

What difference are we making?

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

Bethany's Story

Bethany is a care experienced young person who lacked confidence and was socially isolated. Bethany has experienced bullying since primary school and has found transition to secondary school very challenging. Sadly, Bethany began self-harming again to deal with her emotional wellbeing. She has processing and memory difficulties, global developmental delay, as well as speech and language issues. Bethany said: "I want to be more confident in myself, and try new things with new people. I want to be able to say no instead of going along with people and maybe getting into trouble".

Bethany has attended regular one-to-one and group sessions, both virtually and face to face. She has increased her confidence and social skills to the extent that she has made new friends, feels less isolated and is able to show her sense of fun and voice her own opinions. She participated in an intergenerational project during Covid-19 pandemic, showing pride on what they had produced as individuals and a group. Bethany has also joined in on the Holiday Programme. She has mingled with other young people, had fun and has challenged herself to try new things. She has started to attend drop-in sessions at the youth club, nurturing the friendships established during these sessions.

During her recent review, Bethany acknowledged her journey and is very proud of what she has achieved so far. She can voice her opinions now and speak up where she would not have done previously. This has helped greatly in school. She feels part of her youth group now, and friendships are becoming easier. Bethany said: "I feel good. I feel I've had a good summer with people here and want to maintain that. I have met lots of new people and tried lots of really challenging activities in this programme. Feel more confident and more willing to try new things and go places".

IMPACT 2: Participation and engagement of young people is increased in their communities.

Mark's Story

When Mark first joined Stepping Stones, he was disengaged and had been in trouble at school, in the community and at the youth club. This young person has ADHD and learning difficulties so can find it difficult to stay focused on activities. Mark often fell out with his friends and was very violent and angry towards them. He also struggled with his school work and said he never received enough support at school.

Mark's first goal was to control his anger and to become more empathetic and friendly towards others. He also wanted to believe in himself more and have more confidence. He attended one-to-one and group sessions where he had the opportunity to discuss any issues he was experiencing. He started to volunteer in the youth club and helped revamp the furniture. He also volunteered at the Scottish Borders Walking Festival every evening for five nights where he washed the dishes. The chairperson and volunteer said he was "very conscientious" and they were extremely pleased with his hard work and noticed an improvement in his attitude and behaviour.

Mark had a great transformation and journey with Stepping Stones. He won the Young Person of the Year 2019 and was really proud of this award. He has made solid friendships and has shown his kind and empathetic side by supporting them in troublesome situations and offers advice when it is needed. He is also less likely to be involved in risk-taking behaviours. Mark 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".

Project Worker said: "This young person has been a credit to himself and [Youth Club] and the change in him has been fantastic to be a part of".

IMPACT 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.

Caitlin's Story

Caitlin was referred by her primary school head teacher who was concerned as Caitlin said she felt unhappy and depressed at times and struggled with friendships. She experienced bullying behaviours, spent a lot of time online and was disengaged and underachieving in school. She talked about self-harming and the challenges around her family life. Caitlin said: "I hate people, especially the girls at school. I hate myself; my body and I wish I could be someone else. I am a nothing. There isn't anything to look forward to and I always feel depressed and sad. Cutting myself is a relief but I also hate myself for it".

At the start of Caitlin's Stepping Stones journey, we decided it would be a good idea to go walking to build a relationship. This was a great opportunity for Caitlin to get out the house and have a good chat. In the beginning, she seemed cautious to build a relationship with me however, as time went on her expressions and conversations became more varied and she was able to confide in me and discuss her worries. We also talked about her mental health, friendships and school. Caitlin said: "I didn't want to let you know how low I really feel. People don't want to hear about children who feel like me. I didn't know you because we only just met. The last time you did the questions with me but this time I feel more comfortable answering you honestly".

Caitlin proceeded to complete a Hi5 Award and Dynamic Youth Award and was very proud of herself. Caitlin connected with other young people and feels safe in the group setting. Her confidence has grown considerably as she leads a mentor role within our group. I continue to support Caitlin to assist her in transitioning to secondary school and building self-esteem. I believe she has a huge potential as an artist and look forward to continuing to help her achieve her goals through Stepping Stones. Caitlin said: "I still feel unworthy and often sad and I hate the way I look but I also enjoy life and seeing you every week gives me something to focus on. I often hide my face behind a face covering because you make me constantly smile and I'm not used to it and don't want to. I like that I can be myself and everyone else can be themselves we don't have to be special even [Project Worker] keeps telling me I am. Stepping Stones made me feel like I belong somewhere and I do like some people and I like to care".

IMPACT 4: To improve targeted services and activities through greater collaboration with new and existing partners.

One of the key ways in which collaboration is experienced by Stepping Stones young people is through joint activity. Some partners have worked collaboratively together, with local stakeholders and other organisations to create opportunities which further the young person's needs or interests.

Throughout phase one, young people have enjoyed joint arts and crafts activities including projects with At Birkhill House CIC called 'No strings Attached' and 'Reaching Out Intergenerational Project' where they decorated branch bouquets with an ornamental element. Young people have also experienced outdoor learning activities, virtual cooking and baking sessions, as well as day trips to the cinema, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Whithaugh Park, Fairshawmuir Farm and joint drop-in sessions at youth organisations. Joint activity is a fantastic way for young people to take part in new challenging opportunities and activities, share experiences and increase their confidence and self-esteem.



Reflections from Phase One

Covid-19

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, Project Workers have had to change their delivery from face-to-face to online virtual sessions due to government restrictions. As predicated, this came with a number of difficulties and barriers including communicating with young people, as well as their willingness and confidence to engage virtually. Project Workers also found it exceptionally difficult to establish new connections with young people during this time however, they were able to build on pre-existing relationships and support them throughout the pandemic. This shows how valuable this virtual approach has been during this time. The Covid-19 pandemic poses further considerable risks for our vulnerable young people so it is important now more than ever to respond to their mental health and wellbeing needs. We will continue to meet the needs of Stepping Stones young people and adapt what we are doing accordingly to ensure that support is focused on each individual's needs to help build confidence, resilience and optimism for the future.

RAG Journal

The RAG Journal is an online database used by Project Workers to record young people's progress throughout their journey on Stepping Stones. Following feedback from Project Workers, several developments were made to improve the database's functionality. The frequency and quantity of personal review questions were altered to increase time and capacity for Project Workers to deliver activities and experiences with young people; whilst maintaining a proportionality to our evaluation toolkit.

Communication

The Scottish Borders Youth Work Partnership have attempted to raise the profile of Stepping Stones in a number of ways in order to increase support, attract new volunteers, resources, and promote the project to young people who may benefit from joining. Each locality has updated their website including a central Stepping Stones webpage on the new YouthBorders website: [Stepping Stones - YouthBorders](#). Stepping Stones information leaflets were developed and a [Stepping Stones Facebook page](#) was made public to celebrate and share the impact we are making and promote young people's achievements.

Development Activity

An interim development plan was produced in March 2021 to support the project management of Stepping Stones. This plan set out a clear programme of work for phase two and aimed to improve communication at all levels within the project.

- **Area 1: Communication** - We developed a consistent message and communication strategy across all eight partners, which is reflective of the ambitions and priorities of Stepping Stones.

- **Area 2: Developing Stepping Stones Project Workers** - The Project Team are confident and empowered to carry out their youth work role with young people. The team are able to access opportunities to developing their knowledge and skills and be supported to learn and develop together.
- **Area 3: Leadership and Governance** - Stepping Stones is supported by effective leadership and governance arrangements.

Towards the Future

Through YouthBorders, the Scottish Borders Youth Work Partnership 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.

- We will continue in our commitment to develop and improve the project with the shared intention of achieving impact. We anticipate that 378 young people will be supported through Stepping Stones in phase two.
- 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 support Project Workers to be confident and competent in the collection and recording of data related to young people they are supporting, and to build capacity in these workers to input the data into the project database.
- We will continue to support joint activity or co-delivery opportunities within youth work by encouraging Project Workers to communicate with each other. Project Workers will be supported host at least one joint opportunity per year for one or more partners.
- We will maintain our regular meetings with the Youth Work Managers and Project Workers. These meetings are a good use of time and provide an excellent opportunity to share practice, ideas, and to exchange information.
- We will focus on increasing the profile of Stepping Stones and positioning it within the wider landscape of emotional health and wellbeing activity in the Scottish Borders as part of a whole systems approach.
- We will increase opportunities for further training for Project Workers, and support the induction of new Project Workers.