



Stepping Stones **Year 6 Annual Impact Report**

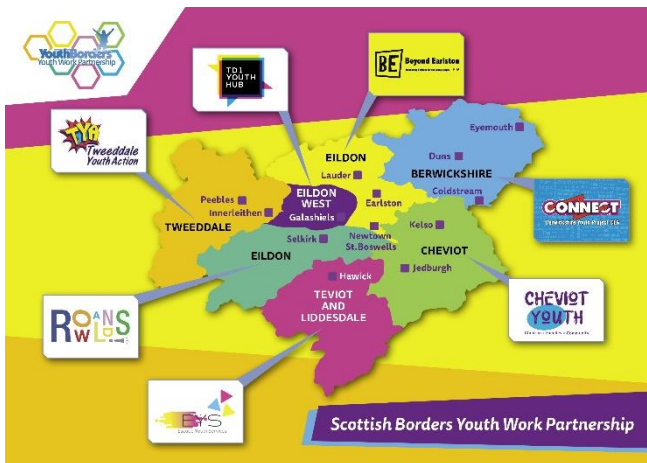


Background

What is Stepping Stones?

Stepping Stones, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, 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. Project Workers support young people based on their personal needs, helping them to achieve their full potential and 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. Focused support with young people includes the setting and reviewing of personal goals which inform the four projects' outcomes:

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 delivery partners are; Beyond Earlston, Cheviot Youth, Rowlands, Escape Youth Services, Connect Berwickshire Youth Project, TD1 Youth Hub and Tweeddale Youth Action.

Figure 1: Scottish Borders Youth Work Partnership Locality Map.

This Stepping Stones annual impact report is prepared for The National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF). This report includes a summary of main achievements, details of who took part, how we have built on people's strengths, connections with other organisations, the difference we are making, finance, risk and learning and next steps for year seven. **All names and identifiers have been changed in case studies and quotes to anonymise the participants and beneficiaries.**

Summary of Main Achievements from Year 6

No. of Supported Young People	No. of New Young People	No. of Young People Who Exited	No. of 1:1 Sessions	No. of Group Sessions	No. of Joint Activities	No. of Youth Awards
85	55	40	844	214	0	12

- In year 6, **90%** of young people who participated in Stepping Stone agreed that their emotional health and wellbeing has improved; **81%** agreed that they participate more and feel more engaged in their community; **74%** agreed that they are more aware of potential risks and **95%** of young people agreed that Stepping Stones has helped them.

Governance

- The Youth Work Partnership Agreement was re-implemented from 1st September 2024, clearly laying out expectations, roles and responsibilities associated with the delivery of Stepping Stones for year seven.
- A comprehensive project review will be undertaken during year seven in order to evaluate the project impacts over the last six years and assess whether the project remains fit for purpose for serving the needs of young people within the Scottish Borders. Specific attention will be made to understand the current needs of young people within each locality. The project review will be undertaken collaboratively ensuring that the voices and insights of each partner and all relevant stakeholders are represented.
- Youth Work Managers are expected to revise their Stepping Stones Delivery Plans for year seven (1 September 2024- 31 August 2025) and discuss these as a group before submitting to TNLCF in December 2024.
- Youth Work Managers continue to meet fortnightly, offering a regular opportunity to share insights, feedback and discuss Stepping Stones Project delivery.
- Youth Borders Chief Officer left the role in August 2024. Recruitment for a new Chief Officer began immediately and is ongoing.

Project Team

- There have been two Stepping Stones project team meetings in year six. The team met in person during Q1 and again in Q4. The gap in meetings was due to no project coordinator being in post to convene them. The importance of regular team meetings has been highlighted by these circumstances and it will be a key effort during year seven to ensure that project workers are meeting regularly as a team to facilitate creative thinking and share relevant risks, learning, resources and common issues.
- Staffing Changes in each locality during year six:
 - The Stepping Stones Project Coordinator left the role in December 2023.

- Recruitment for a new Project Coordinator commenced following funding for year seven of the project being secured. The new project coordinator entered the role in July 2024.
- Cheviot Youth welcomed a new Youth Services Manager in April 2024.
- Cheviot Youth welcomed a new Stepping Stones Project Worker in June 2024.
- The former TD1 Project Worker left the role in August 2024 after three years in post. A new worker was hired internally with immediate effect bringing the benefits of direct youth work experience within the locality to the role.
- Connect Berwickshire welcomed a new Project Worker to cover the Duns/Coldstream area (10hrs per week) in February of 2024. Connect Berwickshire's second Project Worker, covering the Eyemouth area is starting in the role in October 2024 (Q1 of year seven).

Locality Update

- TD1 Youth Hub's contributions to the Stepping Stones project have remained steady and consistent throughout year six supporting young people who are extremely vulnerable, display challenging behaviour and have increasingly complex lives. The intention was noted by TD1 in year five to focus more time on a smaller number of young people to provide adequate support for the increasingly complex needs. This is reflected in the reduction of total supported young people by TD1 from 20 in year five, to 11 in year six (as shown in Table 1, page 6). The Project Worker left the role in August 2024 after three years in post, with a new worker joining immediately with a pre-existing youth work background work within TD1.
- Rowlands Project Worker has been in post since October 2023 and has developed strong ongoing connections with local schools, young people, and their parents. Insights have highlighted the benefits of nurturing relationships with parents/guardians of young people as well as pastoral workers at schools to ensure a holistic support structure for the young person underpinned by consistency and communication. The Project Worker has identified training opportunities to further develop their skill sets including courses related to Trauma.
- To overcome recruitment challenges this year, Connect Berwickshire Youth Project have split the Stepping Stones Project Worker role into two, 10 hour per week roles to cover the large geographic area of the Berwickshire locality. A Project Worker covering the Duns and Coldstream areas was recruited in February 2024 and has since been building connections and relationships within the community, with a specific initial focus on developing a working relationship with Berwickshire High School. This approach has led to a steady flow of referrals. The worker has also been building relationships with young people in P7 including a trip to Eyemouth and to Foxlake Adventures in Dunbar. Connect is set to launch drop ins at their Duns centre in October 2024, aimed at P7 to S1 aged



young people. Connect intends to begin developing relationships with local primary schools around Q3 of year seven to support P7s transitioning to high school. Connect Youth's second Stepping Stones Project Worker covering the Eyemouth area has been recruited and is due to start in October 2024. Uptake on the Stepping Stones services within the Berwickshire area remains steady demonstrating a clear need for the project.



- Cheviot Youth did not have a Project Worker from January to June 2024. Since entering the role, the Project Worker has worked closely with the Cheviot Youth Services Manager to coordinate relevant training and has been making connections within the youth hub and through community groups and school outreach to develop relationships and referral pathways. The project worker will conduct small, targeted groups tailored to the needs of young people raised during outreach activities and is expecting referrals for Stepping Stones to additionally come from schools, CLD and Cheviot's own Insight Youth Mental Health service.
- During year six, the Escape Youth Services Project Worker accessed a variety of training courses including the ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) and Mental Health 'Foundations' and 'Champions' courses which have been beneficial in developing competences towards further supporting young people. The Project Worker has strengthened connections with local schools and other local services/groups leading to a wider referral pathway. Escape Youth has also experienced an increase of self-referrals by young people as well as insights suggesting increasing demand for the Stepping Stones services for ages 16-18, focussing on next steps and life transitions, as well as some evidence of demand for similar services for ages 18-21.
- Tweeddale Youth Action (TYA) had initially planned to begin the year with two project workers in a job share arrangement, however, due to ill health, the role was taken forward by one worker. Despite not having a background in youth work, the Project Worker has hit the ground running and has made strong connections with young people and has managed the Stepping Stones role well whilst achieving strong outcomes for TYA's young people. Links with local schools have strengthened this year which has led to positive outcomes for young people, increased project awareness and targeted referrals. Networking efforts carried out by the Project Worker have been effective this year leading to stronger community connections.
- Beyond Earlston continues to work with established connections within the community. Relationships with schools, community partners, parents and young people continue to be strong. It has been recognised and communicated that high quality training is essential for the role of Stepping Stones Project Worker as well as the need to be aware of staff wellbeing within the role.

Who took part?

In total, **85 young people received support** in year six of Stepping Stones, a reduction from 100 young people in year five.* There were **55 new young people** who joined Stepping Stones and **40 young people who completed** the project in year six. Moreover, **49 young people are expected to continue** into year seven of the project (see table 1). Of the 85 young people who were supported, **42% are male, 45% are female and 13% are listed as 'Other'**. The **average age** of young people involved in the project is **15**, with the ages 14-16 being the most common ages involved. Alongside the 7 part-time Project Workers, **27 volunteers** have been directly involved in the project.

**The reduction in young people receiving support can largely be attributed to Cheviot Youth not having a project worker in post for six months of the year as shown in Table 1 below as well as intentional steps taken by TD1 as highlighted on page 4.*

Table 1: The number of young people from each youth organisation who have joined, received support and completed the project in year six:

	TD1	Connect	Rowlands	Earlston	Escape	TYA	Cheviot	Total
Joined	8	8	6	11	12	9	1*	55
Supported	11	15	6	23	15	9	1*	85
Completed	9	6	0	12	8	5	0	40

**Cheviot Youth did not have a project worker in post for six months of year six. The Project Worker has been undergoing outreach to establish links for referrals during quarter four.*

Table 2: The number of young people who joined were supported and completed the project each quarter in year six.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Joined	17	13	10	9
Supported	42	38	38	30
Completed	13	5	11	5

Table 3: The number of supported young people who fall under each participation reason in year six. Young people may be eligible for more than one reason. These participation reasons are selected jointly by the young person and the Project Worker.

Participation Reason	No. of young people
1. Lack Confidence	55
2. Additional Support or Behavioural Needs	45
3. Underachieving	30
4. Disability or Mental Health Issue	29
5. Low or Non-Attendance	24
6. Disengaged	23
7. Risk Taking Behaviour	20
8. Deprived Area	14
9. Identity Issues	1

How have we built on people's strengths?

One-to-One Sessions

Throughout year six, Project Workers have provided **844 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. Project Workers provide a safe and welcoming environment where everyone is respected, valued, and listened to, without judgement. Feedback was captured from young people through Reviews and Personal Planning:

I'm much happier within myself now.

I love my sessions at school, it gives me a break and I learn new things.

['Project Worker'] helps me and is someone I can talk to and trust.

I am going to more classes and feel more engaged within school.

I started seeing in a more positive light and realized I have options, and it is ok to take time to find out what I want and need.

Taking part in the running group introduced me to a different set of people than I usually hang out with.

I've always wanted to join the panto, but I've never been confident enough to do it. Stepping Stones has helped build my confidence so that I can pursue what I've always wanted to do.

It gives me something to focus on. It helps because my mind is so busy and it helps focus it.

I feel like it is better having someone to talk to rather than keep it in and sit in class or take it out on teachers.

The project is encouraging me to take that leap to make new friends.

I chose to support a new S1 with paired reading, I wouldn't have done that in the past.

Stepping Stones has helped push me out of my comfort zone and helped me do something different

It has given me something to think about and also given me the space to talk about my interests free from judgement.

I actually speak to people now which makes me feel good. I go to college now.

Group Work Sessions, Drop ins and Activities

Project Workers provided a total of **214 group sessions and drop-ins** for young people this year, compared to 292 in year five.* These sessions were a mixture of small, focused activities for Stepping Stones young people, and opportunities to integrate into wider groups that the organisation provides. Below is a summary of group activities from year six:

TD1 Youth Hub

- Netball training & competitions within Galashiels primary school cluster
- Community Police & Fire Service engagement sessions
- Creating posters for defibrillators with Energise Galashiels
- Primary to Secondary transition programme
- Involvement with Galashiels wakening festival and Hike & Bike charity
- Involvement with the commemorative Memorial Award for TD1 community.
- Dynamic Youth Climate Action Challenge

Escape Youth Services

- Bicycle maintenance
- Animation work
- Community sports
- Walking/Running groups
- Woodworking
- Grounds keeping
- Playing in a band

Cheviot Youth

- **Cheviot Youth did not have a project worker in the role for six months of this year.*
- Cheviot Youth recruited a worker in June 2024 who has been developing connections within the community and through drop ins at Cheviot Youth.
- Transform Arts workshop on emotional artistic expressionism

Beyond Earlston

- Duke of Edinburgh
- Sewing, Felting & Business Skills Groups
- Youth Work Games

Tweeddale Youth Action

- Welding in the Innerleithen workshop
- Cooking and learning about dough and pizzas
- Baking & Cooking
- Arts & Crafts
- Bike Repairs & Maintenance
- Designing Fire Pits
- Spray Painting

Connect Berwickshire

- **Connect Youth did not have a project worker until the end of Q2.*
- The Project Worker has since been building rapport with young people through outreach within the community and through connections with Berwickshire High School.
- Stepping Stones young people attended a trip to Foxlake Adventures organised by Connect.

Rowlands

- First Aid
- Food Health & Safety
- Acting Workshop

Joint Activity

There have been no joint activities during year six. This is due to there being no Project Coordinator in post for six months (Q2 and Q3). However, there is a planned joint activity happening in Q1 of year seven which will take place at Tweeddale Youth Action's new pizza shop under their Food Punks project. The joint activity will involve young people and project workers making pizzas together, learning about the preparation and cooking processes and breaking bread together.



Staff Development

Staff continue to attend and suggest training for their own personal development as well as learn skills to better support their young people. Below is a list of learning opportunities Stepping Stones Project Workers received in year six.

Staff Development / Training / CPD	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Protection Training • C-Card Training • Food Hygiene • Saltire Volunteering Awards • Dynamic Youth Awards • Mental Health Foundation • Mental Health Champions Course • Dementia Friendly Training • Referrals for local food banks • Fire pit sales • ASIST Training • Place2Be Mental Health Champions Foundation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive & Survive NHS Training • Feelings Inspector (Youth Scotland) • Child Sexual Exploitation Training • Shared Leadership inspired by Herd Dynamics • Embodied Flow Training • Place2Be Mental Health Champions Foundation • Child Protection Officer Training • Youth Scotland Supervision Training • Enquire (Teacher & SEN training) • Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences: Level 2 (West College of Scotland)

Young People's Development

Throughout year six, three young people achieved Hi5 youth awards. Below is a list of other volunteering and learning opportunities Stepping Stones young people participated in during year six:

Young People's Development	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young Philanthropy Initiative • Transform Arts Workshop • Welding & Bike Repairing within the community • Baking/Cooking • Spray Painting Art • Dementia Friendly Training • Saltire Awards • Hi5 Awards • Young Scot grant writing session • Wider Achievement Award (Hi5) • Running Group • Woodworking • John Muir Award for School allotment/garden contributions • Playing music in a band • Walking group • First Aid Training • Food Safety • Acting workshop • Inspire Awards • Duke of Edinburgh Award • Rider assessment • Sewing, felting and business skills workshops 	<p>Young people enjoyed volunteering opportunities with a variety of different groups and organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hawick Acorn Initiative • Drop-in sessions and leading activities • Community eco-group • Work experience as occupational therapist • Work experience as a roofer

Connections with other organisations

A benefit of working as a partnership includes the collaboration between a range of external partners. Networking and building on existing and new relationships with partner agencies and other support services has not only been valuable in gathering and maintaining a good support circle for young people and their families but has also raised the community profile of Stepping Stones, providing new opportunities of engagement for our young people.

Project Workers have found that being proactive with local networking is invaluable for forming new professional relationships which work towards a stronger sense of awareness of support pathways and opportunities for young people as well as leading to more targeted referrals for Stepping Stones.

One Project Worker said: ***“Having one person to contact from the high school, instead of numerous teachers is so much easier to keep things moving and changes can be made straight away. Especially if anything has happened with home life, relationships and life in general.”***

Below is the full list of partners the Project Workers have worked with during year six:

Networking Partners	
1. Guidance/Patrol Teachers	21. Insight Mental Health Services
2. Parents & Guardians	22. Transform Arts
3. Foster Parents	23. Grange Hall Nursing Home for Intergenerational Project
4. Career Advisors	24. Children 1 st
5. CLD Peebles	25. Birkhill
6. Peebles High School	26. GP and paediatrician partnership planning
7. Peebles Food Bank	27. CHIMES
8. Stable Life	28. Eat, Sleep, Ride
9. Hawick High School	29. Lauder Primary School
10. Youth Mental Health Networking & Learning Event	30. Galashiels Primary Schools x3
11. Youth Enquiry Service (YES)	31. Community Police Officer
12. CAMHS	32. Energise Galashiels / Galashiels Heartland
13. Youth Borders & Youth Scotland Training	33. Galashiels Community Fire Station
14. Action for children	34. Hike & Bike Charity
15. Works+	35. Galashiels Walking Festival
16. Selkirk High School	36. Eyemouth High School
17. Earlston High School	37. Police Scotland
18. Christmas Fayre (Earlston Primary School)	38. CLD Kelso
19. Kelso High School	39. CLD Jedburgh
20. Kelso Primary Schools: Broomlands, Sprouston, Moorebattle, Yetholm, and Edenside	40. Scottish Borders Council
	41. Foxlake Adventures

What difference are we making?

Project Workers support young people to complete evaluation questions to monitor and track their progress. Project Workers can compare the young person's results at an individual level over time. Young people answer these questions at baseline and subsequent follow-ups every 10-12 weeks. Below are the average results from year six.

Outcome 1: In year 6, **90% of young people agreed that their emotional health and wellbeing has improved.**

- "I really enjoyed writing to a pen-pal, as I usually don't talk to people other than my friends."
- "Regularly being part of this group has really helped improve my confidence."
- "It gives me something to look forward to through the week, it helps take the stress away."
- "I've grown in confidence in myself, talking to new people, meeting new people, more confidence in being me. "
- "Yeah, getting out of the house has really helped."
- Through some of the activities we did, particularly building the bookshelf, helped [young person] to recognise her own potential and do things she didn't think she was capable of.
- "I feel like I can talk now and not keep it all to myself. I feel more settled, safer and secure now."
- "I have not been lashing out or showing all of my emotions. I am better able to control my emotions."

Outcome 2: In year 6, **81% of young people agreed that they participate more and feel more engaged in their community.**

- "I chose to support a new S1 with paired reading, I wouldn't have done that in the past."
- "I can take the leadership role in a group if there isn't one, I would also say that I am good at working with people collaborating with people to reach certain goals."
- "I actually speak to people now, which makes me feel good. I go to college now."
- "I do lots of sports and activities, have more positive friendship group, and now that living arrangements are more secure, I feel more settled here."
- "I've started participating more in school activities. I have started volunteering at the coffee morning in the school."
- "I visited eat, sleep, ride and felt like I wanted to take part. We booked an assessment and I look forward to it."

Outcome 3: In year 6, **74% of young people agreed that they are more aware of potential risks** and think about the **consequences before making decisions.**

- “I grew up, I haven’t argued with someone in months. It has helped.”
- “It has helped me control my anger more, I now think about the consequences of my actions.”
- “We talked about education and the risk of becoming homeless and living without money and resources. I feel I want to better myself and achieve my goals.”
- “I am more aware of what I says and how it can affect others.”
- “Getting better at thinking things through before acting - and resolving”
- “We talked a lot about mental health, self-harming and toxic relationships which I found helpful in regards to some of my online friendships.”

Outcome 4: In year 6, **95% of young people agreed that Stepping Stones has helped them.**

- “It has helped me because of the group of people I am around can make it more entertaining, so it helps boost my confidence.”
- "Gives me someone to communicate with when it comes to problems, worries, and things like that, and something to take my mind off the stresses of life."
- “I’ve got more confident through Stepping Stones. Before Stepping Stones, I didn’t see myself doing anything, it has helped change my own ideas of myself. I got into college, I’m smart. It has been a good environment to come to, someone to talk to.”
- “Stepping stones has helped push me out my comfort zone and helped me do something different.”
- “I feel like I can talk more and share things now, so not such a burden. Having someone to talk to and listen has encouraged openness with family and social work.”
- "I don't get angry anymore about how I look, it has changed the way I see myself."
- “I started seeing in a more positive light and realized I have options and it is ok to take time to find out what I want and need.”

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. Some examples of case studies from year six demonstrating the four project outcomes are provided on the following page.

All names and identifiers have been changed in case studies and quotes to anonymise the participants and beneficiaries.

A video sharing the personal impacts that youth work and projects such as Stepping Stones can have in supporting local young people was commissioned by the Youth Work Partnership and created by McGowen Marketing. The video can be found at <https://youthborders.org.uk/stepping-stones/>

Outcome 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.

Case Study One:

Lilly is an S2 pupil who finds navigating school and relationships with peers and school staff difficult. She expects everyone to think negatively about her and finds it difficult to trust adults in a professional position. "No one at school listens to me".

She told me she feels odd, weird and different and no one likes her. Through conversations Lilly explained and explored her primary school years – difficulties she experienced with a language delay and speech impairment and her peers' reactions and fun making. Adults that she trusted didn't intervene and she didn't feel heard or seen.

This experience was carried over to high school. Lilly still struggles with undiagnosed language processing challenges which makes school difficult for her – she wants to do well.

Communication between her and school and school and parents weren't working.

We worked through Lilly's symptoms of anxiety and intrusive thoughts – we covered how anxiety develops and explored strategies. It was a relief for Lilly to find out that she wasn't the only one who experienced these overwhelming feelings.

Lilly asked if we could include her parents in some of our sessions and I arranged home visits as the parents don't have the financial means to come to school. Her parents are supportive of Lilly's needs and supported some of our strategies we covered during our sessions. Lilly wanted to have a meeting with her guidance teacher, parents and myself. We planned this meeting over a few sessions – unfortunately her guidance teacher hasn't replied to any of our emails, and I advised her parents to include Lilly's headteacher in any further communication.

Lilly implemented her strategies. The space to talk freely about her feelings, about her scary thoughts and anxiety helped her to set herself some challenges which she worked through. Some of Lilly's achievements include:

- Lilly's best and only friend went abroad during school time for six weeks and Lilly didn't want to come to school, fearing other pupils and the feeling of loneliness. Lilly attended school during her friend's absence with one day off for her mental health when she stayed at home.
- She felt she was able to communicate and plan a meeting with a teacher that she didn't trust.
- She attended an acting workshop that she was afraid of and took part in the audition.
- She moved with her parents who had received an eviction notice and managed to talk about her worries and anxieties.
- Lilly's school attendance improved greatly with only two days off during the last quarter in comparison to over a week off in the previous quarter.
- Lilly is thinking ahead of her future and what she would like to achieve.

Lilly and her parents awaited a CAMHS appointment for an ASD assessment.

"I still feel anxious and worry a lot, but I understand this is art of how I tick. I need to remember my strategies which help and allow me to feel safer."

Outcome 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.

Case Study Two:

The young person had previously experienced severe bullying for a multi-year period, a mixture of emotional and physical abuse had led to the young person becoming withdrawn from school. This resulted in a PTSD diagnosis and led to them missing the majority of their first 3 years in High School and as a result they haven't been able to reach their academic potential. Additionally, their confidence in public and self-esteem in general had become very low and comfort eating had led to a weight increase that resulted in them not being able to take part in activities that they once used as an escape and really enjoyed namely, horse riding.

Throughout the course of the young person's involvement with Stepping Stones, they have engaged in a number of activities and challenges which have demonstrated a clear improvement in their confidence, wellbeing and willingness to participate in activities that matter to them. Some examples include designing, building and painting a bookshelf in the local Men's shed. A bodyweight exercise plan was designed after the closure of the local gym. The young person showed their passion and ability in baking by taking the lead on all aspects of preparation, baking and tidying up during sessions. To take their next step the young person volunteered for Escape on our family fun day helping to set up, serve refreshments, steward, offer support to other young people and tidy away. The experience was supported by the worker and other staff on duty.

After completion of the above the young person identified that they would like to continue to work on their social anxiety however they were not yet ready to do this in the community. Instead, they focused on building their own self confidence through personal challenges. This is involving regular bike rides building physical fitness and stamina. Their end goal of which is to complete a bike ride of several miles between to points of interest in the town.

The wood working project saw them gain new woodworking and power tool knowledge and kept them motivated as they saw their progress build week on week. Importantly over the course of the sessions the young person slowly began to interact with other members of the public using the space. They are now comfortable enough to speak to and ask questions of volunteers and there is a noticeable increase in confidence in the setting.

The young person understands the benefits of stepping out of their comfort zone for their own personal growth and their voluntary work on the family fun day really exemplified this. They were noticeably nervous to begin with however once they had started, they fell into a rhythm and performed really well. To help showcase their hard work they have also signed up for Saltire awards so they can gain recognition of the achievements.

The young person's resilience and confidence in their own ability is growing noticeably and they continue to have a drive to progress in their journey. The young person's guardian mentioned a noticeable positive difference in them after coming back from a session and they display noticeable interest in trying new experiences. The young person has surprised themselves with their ability to adapt to a new environment communicating with strangers and has showed resilience tackling regular ill health while attending our appointments and continuing with other commitments.

A highlight of the young person's progress is in their completion of their volunteer shift on the family fun day, navigating a crowded environment and interacting directly with many members of the public.

Outcome 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.

Case Study Three:

Cee (15yrs) was referred by a local children's agency who worked with them for the last 12 months due to a breakup within the family, looming homelessness and a difficult friendship circle who wasn't a supportive influence. Cee's worker was worried because the work with the organisation came to an end, and she felt that Cee didn't have enough support to upkeep the positive steps they made over the last few months.

We met casually over lunch for few weeks to get to know each other. Cee talked more about their interest in driving tractors and lorries and their interest in cooking and agriculture. We discussed why Cee chose hospitality as their college course and it was obvious they thought it was their only option because Cee liked cooking. No other options were explored, they didn't speak to their parents and there wasn't a trusted adult available to guide and coach Cee.

We talked about options of changing college course or seeking alternative educational options. I asked Cee if they would like to engage with Eat, Sleep, Ride CIC to learn more about horse care and agricultural topics which they readily agreed to.

I arranged a pre-visit to give Cee the chance to decide if they wanted to go forward with an assessment through Eat, Sleep, Ride and they enjoyed the visit and finalised an appointment to meet with the director of the organisation.

Meanwhile Cee came back to me telling me they thought about their college choices and decided to fill out an application for the agricultural course at the local college. The college read their personal statement and confirmed Cee could change course if they wanted to. I told Cee how proud I was of them to take matters in their own hands and change their path. In the past Cee didn't think to chance their circumstances and rather spent time running away from difficult decisions.

"I realised after we talked that I could change my application and actually study what I feel interests me most. If I don't like it, I can still try something else."

Cee is only 15 years old, and my aim is to support their learning which wasn't a positive experience in the past. With the option of the changed college course, Cee feels in control of their learning and the option to gain either a degree or volunteer with Eat, sleep, ride if they choose, I feel comfortable that Cee has options to make an informed decision what their next academic year looks like.

Cee was able in a short period of time to use learned skills and develop new skills to actively participate in planning their own future. They carefully made steps to communicate with their family and mum in particular made a great effort to support Cee's decisions.

My work with Cee will continue over the next few months to support their learning and participation in the community towards an independent future.

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

Case Study Four:

I recently started working with an S2 boy through one-to-one sessions and small group work. The school had made a referral because he was struggling in classes and needed Stepping Stones support.

We often cook and bake during our one-to-one sessions, and we also formed a small group with another young person to plan our fire pit designs for the Bike Punks workshop they attend each week. We submitted an application with a design and were awarded some funding from the Youth Borders Youth LAG (Local Action Group) project.

This has been a positive experience, and we have formed a good relationship. He has opened up about how he is feeling, and we talk about troubles at school and home life. Home life has been chaotic with lots of change and pressure to help out around the house and with younger siblings. This has led to the young person being tired and short tempered and sometimes lashing out at school. I am in contact with the school regularly, so we are all making sure he is getting help and support, including reviewing his timetable regularly and checking in with him daily to make sure he is ok.

His mum and her partner recently split up and there has been extra pressure at home. He has been struggling to stay awake at school as he has been up at nighttime feeding his new baby sister to give his mum a break. He told me they had been struggling for food and were not eating properly. During our sessions we focussed on cooking food he could take home, and I arranged for the family to receive a food box from the food bank, as well as some vouchers. This was the first time I had made a referral to the food bank, and I felt a bit nervous of offending them or overstepping. Instead, they were over the moon and looked like they had a weight lifted from their shoulders. His mum was so grateful, and I think the help had come at a perfect time.

The family now have some food as well as electricity vouchers and some financial pressure has been taken off his mum, who won't have to choose between eating or heating with a newborn in the house. We have passed on lots of information about what is available for them and to help them in the future. I will continue to check in with them and help them access the support that is available.

What have we spent this year?

Stepping Stones Project Funding & Expenditure (Localities)

PROJECT FUNDING	QTR 1	QTR 2	QTR 3	QTR 4	TOTAL YR 6		
INCOME	TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL	BUDGET	ACTUAL	PROJECTED OVER / (UNDER SPEND)
Carry Forward	£3,410.46*				£3,410.46	£3,410.46	£0.00
Income from National Lottery	£155,499.00				£155,499.00	£155,499.00	£0.00
TOTAL	£158,909.46				£158,909.46	£158,909.46	£0.00
EXPENDITURE							
Youth Borders Coordinator Costs (see table below for further details)	£31,864.00				£31,846.00	£31,846.00	£0
7 x Partner Payments for Project workers & Activities	£101,526.00		£16,921.00		£118,447.00	£118,447.00	£0
Project monitoring and evaluation database/app	£312.50	£312.50	£312.50	£312.50	£4,800.00	£1,250.00	(£3,550.00)
Youth Activities/Training/Social Action				£500	£500.00	£500.00	£0.00
*Underspend Stepping Stones Video	£2880.00		£226.20		£3,298.46	£3,106.20	(£192.26)
TOTAL	£136,582.50	£312.50	£17,459.70	£812.50	£158,909.46	£155,167.20	(£3,742.26)**

*Underspend carry forward has been used to commission McGowan Marketing to plan and deliver a video to showcase the impacts and outcomes achieved by the Youth Work Partnership. This video can be found here: <https://youthborders.org.uk/stepping-stones/>

** Plans for the underspend from Y6 are pending discussion and decision in absence of a Chief Officer at Youth Borders at the time of publishing this report.

Stepping Stones Project Funding & Expenditure (Central/YouthBorders)

YOUTH BORDERS FUNDING	QTR 1	QTR 2	QTR 3	QTR 4	TOTAL YR 5		
INCOME	ACTUAL	ACTUAL	ACTUAL	ACTUAL	BUDGET	ACTUAL	PROJECTED OVER/ (UNDER SPEND)
Carry Forward	£13,685.00*				£13,685.00	£13,685.00	£0.00
Income from National Lottery	£31,864.00				£31,968.00	£31,968.00	£0.00
TOTAL	£45,549.00				£45,549.00	£45,549.00	£0.00

EXPENDITURE							
1 x YouthBorders Project Coordinator	£6,240.59	£3,210.10		£3,807.44	£24,820.00	£13,258.13	(£11,561.87)
1 x YouthBorders worker supervision costs	£3,103.00				£3,103.00	£3,103.00	£0
Coordinator travel; home working allowance; IT replacement equipment	£170.17	£31.95		£80.78	£320.00	£282.90	(£37.10)
Central Administration @ YouthBorders	£2,200.00				£2,200.00	£2,200.00	£0
Phone Budget	£45.00	£15.00		£74.00	£180.00	£134.00	(£46.00)
IT Costs				£2,096.00	£2,096.00	£2,096.00	£0
Carried forward funds allocated to localities*				£9,936.00	£11,592.00	£9,936.00	(£1,656.00)
Additional Expenditure			£762.45	£213.50	£1,238.00	£975.95	(£262.05)
TOTAL	£11,758.76	3,317.05	£762.45	£16,207.72	£45,549.00	£31,985.98	(£13,563.02)**

*Carried forward funds from year five were allocated equally to each locality within the partnership to be used to support the facilitation of the Stepping Stones project.

**Underspend from Youth Borders expenditure is primarily due to there being no project coordinator in post for 6 months. The plans for the underspend are pending discussion and decision in absence of a Chief Officer at Youth Borders.

Risks, Challenges, Learnings & Opportunities

Lack of effective communication between stakeholders:

It has been highlighted that the sharing of information regarding a young person's progress and needs may not always be effectively communicated between professional bodies, schools or parents/carers which can create challenges for those involved with the young person's wellbeing and the risk of the young person not receiving the most targeted support possible. If a young person is or has been receiving support from several different support entities, it is imperative that clear communication occurs between these bodies to ensure that the young person does not get left behind in circumstances of staff changes, age-range transitions or disjointed communications across services such as CLD, Social Work or Law Enforcement. This also highlights the benefit of Stepping Stones 'no time-limit' policy to support young people during gaps that may occur in receiving other support as well as being open for re-referral at a later stage if necessary.

Increased need of higher-level specialist support:

Stepping Stones sits within tier 1 and 2 of the 'Scottish Borders Framework for Staged Intervention Model' and provides early intervention and prevention support to young people. Some young people are dealing with more serious issues and require a higher level of specialist support that is beyond the scope of Stepping Stones. There is an identified gap in specialist mental health services sitting between early intervention and CAMHS which has been highlighted in the previous years impact report. Long waiting lists for specialist services may lead to Stepping Stones being the only support a young person receives during critical times. Awareness of the boundaries of the Stepping Stones project scope amongst stakeholders such as parents/carers, schools and the young person themselves are essential to ensure that the Project Worker is not overwhelmed with the need to fulfil a service that is beyond their skill set. Project Workers will collate and share appropriate signposting in their quarterly update and at team meetings to offer the correct support to young people and support Stepping Stones Project Workers.

Time Limit:

As the Stepping Stones service has no time limit, Project Workers must be mindful of the purpose of support, ensuring that there is still gain for young people to remain involved rather than them becoming reliant on Project Workers. It is important Project Workers are having conversations with young people, so they are continuing to set goals and see a purpose to support rather than just becoming routine. Decisions to end support should be mutual, with the understanding that 'the door remains open' should they need to seek assistance again in the future. It has been experienced that if a young person's involvement with Stepping Stones goes beyond a natural and mutual conclusion (for example, if a young person is on a waiting list for onward or specialist support services), their perception of value for the project may diminish and can result in the young person suddenly dropping the sessions. This scenario may be disconcerting and demoralising for the Project Worker as well as presenting a challenge in maintaining a duty of care.

Staff Wellbeing:

It is vital to ensure that Project Workers are aware of the importance of looking after their own mental well-being whilst supporting young people who are facing on-going challenges. Compassion fatigue has been raised as a risk for staff as it can be common in people who support young people with complex needs/trauma. It is important for Project Workers to be open about their wellbeing within the role and for support measures to be in place. Project Workers will continue to have regular support and supervision meetings with their manager and can utilize the Project Coordinator and/or team meetings as a safe space to talk through any thoughts or problems and to gain valuable advice and support from the team.

Schools:

Relationships and levels of communication with schools varies throughout the seven localities. Project Workers continue to communicate with teachers and other school staff to share information and obtain referrals. There is a risk of service in-consistency of effective referrals, communication and signposting for the service depending on the relationship between locality partners and local schools. The benefit of having one dedicated person within schools to communicate with regarding young people and referrals has been highlighted and therefore, best practice approaches for maintaining strong links with schools should be observed and shared in order to maximise the effectiveness and consistency of project delivery and communication with wider stakeholders.

Parent/Guardian Engagement:

Relationships and levels of communication with parents/guardians also varies throughout the seven localities. In some cases, this can make it more difficult to move forward referrals which require a joint response to support and needs. However, some Project Workers have highlighted that parental engagement and communication has been invaluable and allows them to share information and tailor support to young people's needs. Several parents have also provided positive feedback on the impact on Stepping Stones.

Age Ranges:

It is apparent that young people entering the 18-21 age range are lacking dedicated support with some Stepping Stones young people being likely to benefit from continued support within this timeframe. The Stepping Stones project is currently targeted at ages 10-18, however, the following age range represents a critical transition stage in which young people could fall at risk of not receiving appropriate adult support services. Additionally, the 16-18 age group may benefit from tailored 'next steps' or transitional activities which may mitigate the needs of the previously mentioned 18-21 age group.

Rural Challenges:

The geographic nature of the Scottish Borders has long presented logistical challenges regarding travel, transport and access to services due to the rural location of many young people. These challenges are faced more acutely by some localities within the Youth Work Partnership and the difficulties are heightened during the school holidays. Operating a regionwide service across different areas, each with different needs and nuances, represents a challenge for the project when considering the overall consistency of the service provided.

Training & Accreditation:

It has been raised that some of the training available to Project Workers within the sector does not offer professional accreditation beyond an attendance certificate. There is also a disparity between the levels of training held by each Project Worker with differential factors due to amount of time in post, previous experience and their understanding of and access to the training landscape and opportunities available. There is an opportunity to ensure each Project Worker benefits from a peer reviewed selection of targeted training and CPD opportunities to bolster the service offering for young people, ensure staff are supported at an equal level and to create value within the role itself through the acquisition of recognized and transferable skills and qualifications. Efforts to introduce a baseline training package may benefit to be considered in line with the Scottish Borders Framework for Staged Intervention Model so to reinforce and clarify the position of Stepping Stones within the model for all stakeholders. The introduction of a high-level training baseline may also improve staff retention and reduce gaps in employment.

Continuing & Emerging issues:

Issues such as use of smart phones, vaping, drugs and alcohol continue to be prevalent. In addition, there is a need for increased awareness and improved approaches to supporting neurodiverse young people and the barriers these young people and their families face because of the variation in their needs. Furthermore, the need for training and refresher training on safeguarding policies and procedures is notable following reported instances of inappropriate entry of parents to youth settings at pick-up/drop-off as well as awareness of the specific needs/tendencies of certain young people regarding involvement with sharps/scissors. Regular risk assessments should be made regarding youth activities, especially for kitchen activities or those involving tools. Staff must be versatile and trained adequately in leading sessions as well as ensuring young people are well supported in these activities.

Towards the Future

- Youth Work Managers will revise and review their Stepping Stones delivery plans before the end of 2024 so they can tailor this to the needs of their young people. Each delivery plan will be peer reviewed and collectively supported by all Youth Work Managers.
- In the coming year (year seven), the Youth Work Partnership will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the Stepping Stones project over the last six years. The project outcomes and delivery methods will be reviewed to ensure that these are fit for purpose and effectively meet the current needs of young people in each locality.
- The evaluation process will guide plans and funding pathways for the continuation of the project in the future years (1 September 2025 onwards).
- We will continue to review and appraise the learning needs and youth work delivery of our Project Workers as a routine aspect of support and supervision.
- We will continue to meet as a Project Worker team each quarter to retain and support each other in a group setting.
- The Youth Work Managers group will continue to meet fortnightly online, as a positive peer support space.

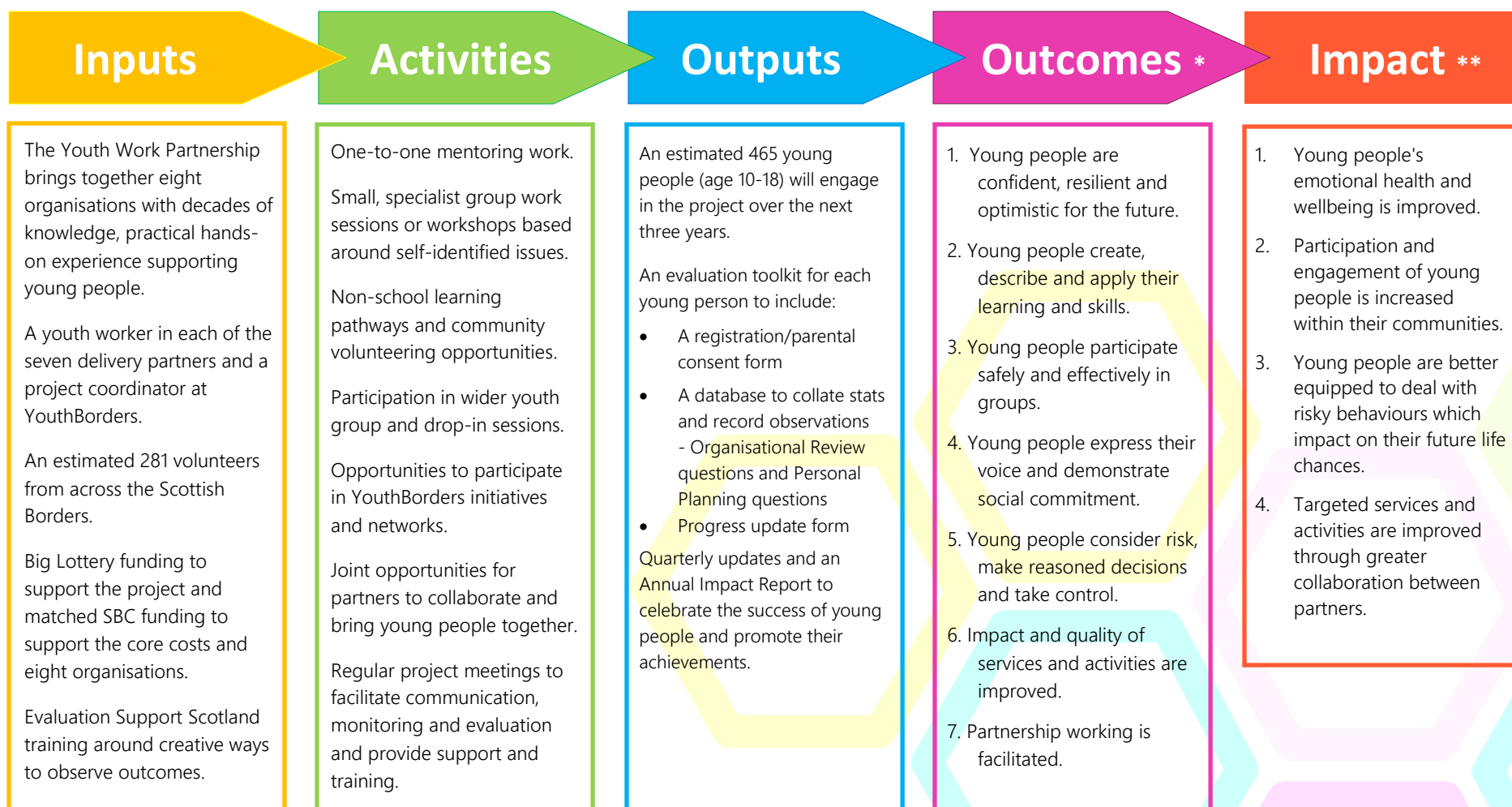
For further information about Stepping Stones and the Scottish Borders Youth Work Partnership please contact Jamie Bowers-Clark, Project Coordinator at YouthBorders; jamie@youthborders.org.uk

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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.	

Glossary

Case Studies – A short story which outlines a young person’s journey on the Stepping Stones project.

Group Work Sessions – Work/activities done by a group of people, involving Stepping Stones young people.

Organisational Reviews – A set of scale questions which reflect the outcomes and impacts of the Stepping Stones Logic Model.

Personal Planning – A set of text questions which reflect the outcomes and impacts of the Stepping Stones Logic Model.

Stepping Stones Toolkit – Stepping Stones Pathway, Evaluation Framework and Logic Model which was informed by the National Youth Work Outcomes and ‘How Good is Out Third Sector Organisation’.

The Scottish Borders Youth Work Partnership - The Partnership is made up of seven lead locality based generic youth groups (Beyond Earlston, Cheviot Youth, Rowland’s (Selkirk), Escape Youth Services, Connect Berwickshire Youth Project, TD1 Youth Hub and Tweeddale Youth Action) and YouthBorders.