

# Borders

Community Action



Transform Arts CIC

Tweeddale Youth Action

Brighter Blainslie Village  
Community Group

## WARM WELCOME SPACES ACROSS THE BORDERS

## GRANT DISPERSION – IMPACT EVALUATION

April 2024

# Keeping people well in the Borders

The cost of living crisis continues to have a negative impact on our rural communities. This issue becomes more exacerbated in the winter months when opportunities for social connections are reduced and the cost to eat and heat homes increases.

The long winter months can be difficult for many people, particularly for those experiencing loneliness or struggling with energy bills. It is quite common to feel isolated during the winter months. As the daylight hours reduce and the weather gets colder, the season often brings a sense of loneliness and detachment from our social circle. The colder weather can make socialising more difficult and less appealing, but there's more at play here. The exposure we get to natural light decreases a lot, which can also impact emotional well-being.

There is no doubt that the winter period presents considerable challenges to people who need to access health and social care services. Emerging as a way to support people in communities during the cost of living crisis, warm spaces became popular all over the UK, benefiting people of all ages and abilities beyond reducing financial pressures but also by bringing people together and reducing social isolation.

In August 2023, Borders Community Action engaged in conversation with statutory partners and in consultation with the third sector, created a community-led response to keep people well in the Scottish Borders. The project aimed to provide opportunities for social connections, increase resilience, reduce pressure on services and improve the mental health and well-being of people of all ages and abilities.

This document is a summary report of the activities that emerged as a result of this approach. The aim is to reflect on this joint effort, while providing information on how the grant was allocated. Most of all, it highlights the value of the third sector as a key player in improving the lives of people in our communities.



*Juliana Amaral*  
Chief Executive Officer

# A Collaborative Approach

In response to the crisis, a partnership between Health and Social Care partners, community groups and third sector organisations came together to provide local solutions to keep people well in communities over the winter months.

In September 2023, Borders Community Action started engaging with the third sector to gather information about local solutions and community-led responses about what could be done over the winter months and the resources required to make it happen. A survey was circulated based on the intelligence gathered and the idea of Warm, Welcome Spaces emerged.

Proposals emerged as a result of previous pilot projects run in Berwickshire the previous winter.

Borders Community Action created a joint approach for this response and funding was obtained as a result. With thanks to the National Lottery Community Fund and Scottish Borders Health and Social Care Partnership, a total of £40,000 was obtained to support local communities.



The Royal British Legion Warm Welcome Space



Scottish Borders  
Health and Social Care  
PARTNERSHIP

# Administration of the grant

The process of applying for and receiving the grant was intended to be fast and efficient.

A set of specific criteria was created to ensure grants were allocated based on evidence of need and in line correct protocols such as governance documentation, annual accounts and legal structure.

Additionally, It is important to recognise that each community is unique and with many activities often delivered mainly by volunteers, flexibility was key however, parameters were created such as:

- Only offer food that has “social value”, that is food that we would want to eat and of nutritious value
- Encourage ordinary places – by this we mean deliver activities as far as possible in spaces that are welcoming and not themselves stigmatised.
- Provide an activity that is stimulating, other than just a place to warm up.

Additionally, in order to foster collaboration and avoidance of duplication applicants were encouraged to:

- Support existing projects to do things better or extend and supplement their activities.
- Support extensions of current community lunches and social food activities.
- Provide warm spaces by encouraging and supporting existing venues which could provide a warm space and refreshments at the same time as delivering a socially valued activity.
- Discourage mission drift by funding projects with clearly defined boundaries and outcomes.





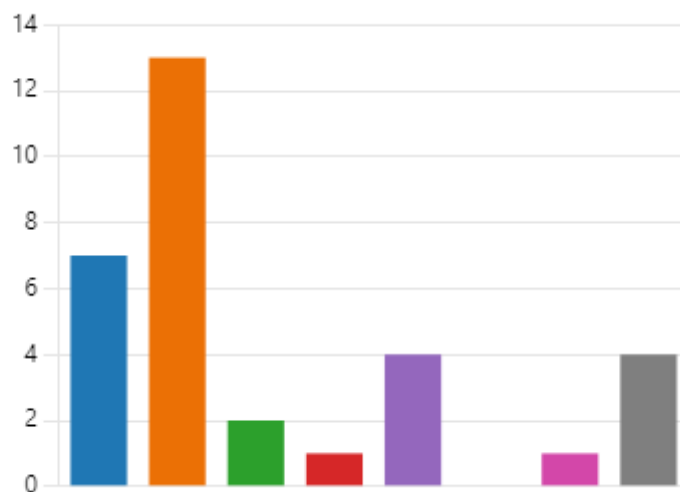
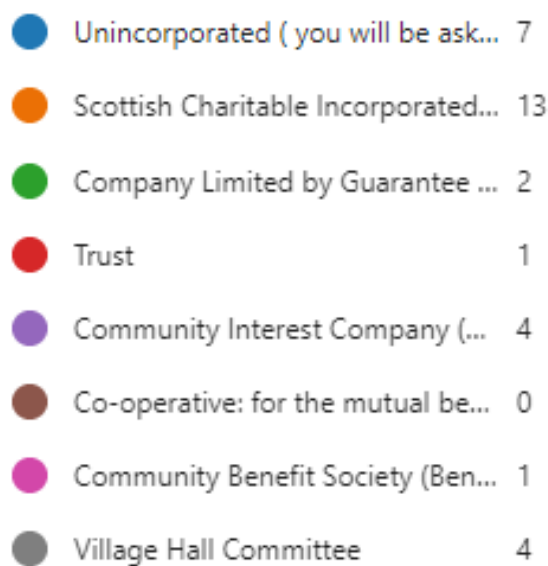
# Grant Applications

A total of **30 grant applications** were received.

A total of **8 applications were declined** for not matching the fund criteria or inability to provide activities that were available to anyone in our communities.



The organisations who benefitted from the grant varied in size of organisation/ community group, legal structure and scope of activities provided for community benefit.



The lowest award made was £600 with 6 organisations obtaining the full £2000 amount requested. The timescale for panel's assessment and decisions on applications was of 7 working days, unless further information was required about specific elements of the project.

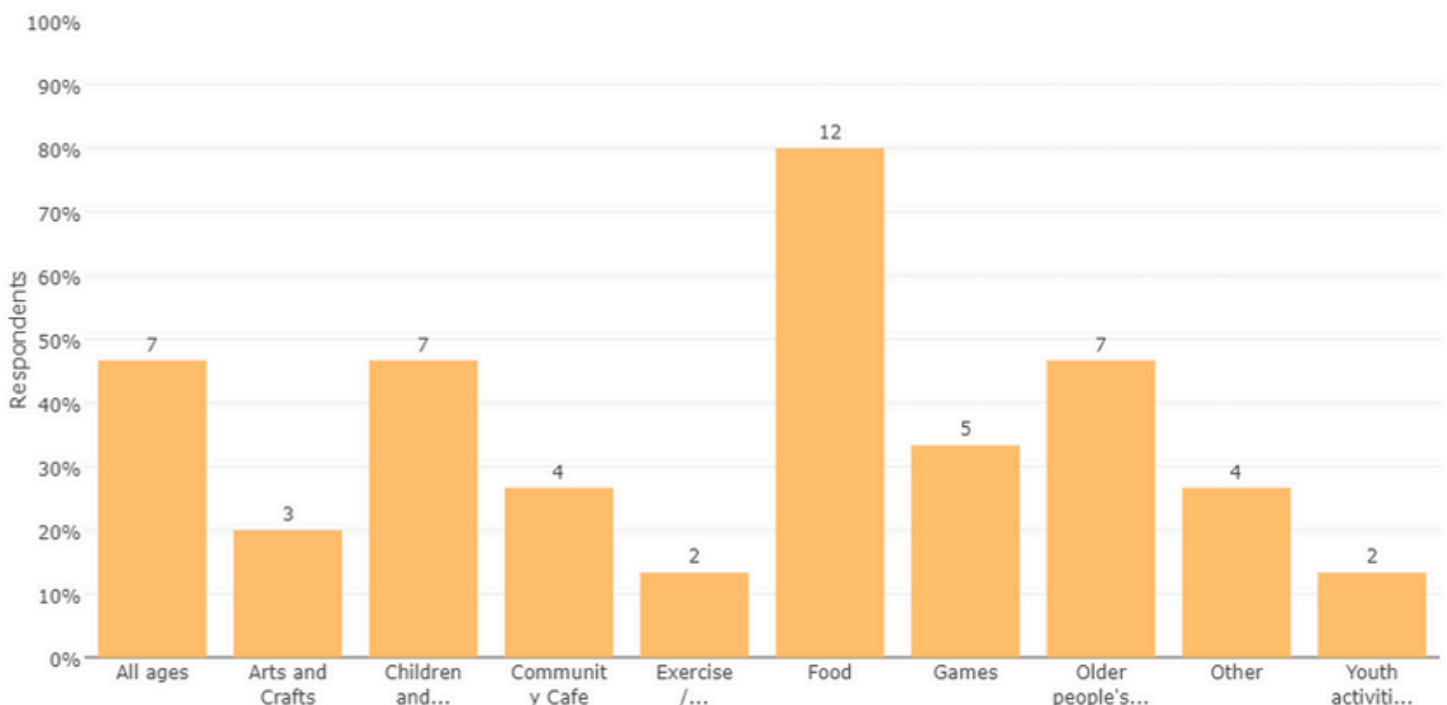
The assessment panel met on a weekly basis to ensure applications were processed and grants were dispersed promptly. Liaison with the National Lottery Community Fund meant knowledge was shared and due diligence was followed.

# Reach

The grant benefitted a wide range of community groups and organisations across the Scottish Borders with a varied spread across the 5 localities:



The activities provided by these groups and organisations varied across each community, benefitting people of all ages and abilities. It is estimated that a total of **3,900 people benefitted from activities** such as:



# Change starts with communities

The warm welcome spaces were delivered mainly by volunteers, with some organisations relying on a combination of paid staff and volunteers.

A total of **58 volunteers** dedicated an estimated of **1,392 hours** to these initiatives. A total of **10 paid staff** supported the delivery of activities.

Some volunteers are now engaged in other projects in the community as a result of involvement.



The Royal British Legion Warm Welcome Space



Tweeddale Youth Action

## What did volunteers say about the experience:

*Love the cafe hub - The most vulnerable amongst them often come and sit for a long period of time and come regularly.*

*Good to meet and help people who benefited from the facility.*

*I loved the Tuesday night art sessions, they went really well. Emma is intending chatting to you as we would love to continue with something similar in the future.*

*I really enjoyed it, I think we all did, and the artwork was amazing'. 'It was just a shame it had to end we were having such a good time*

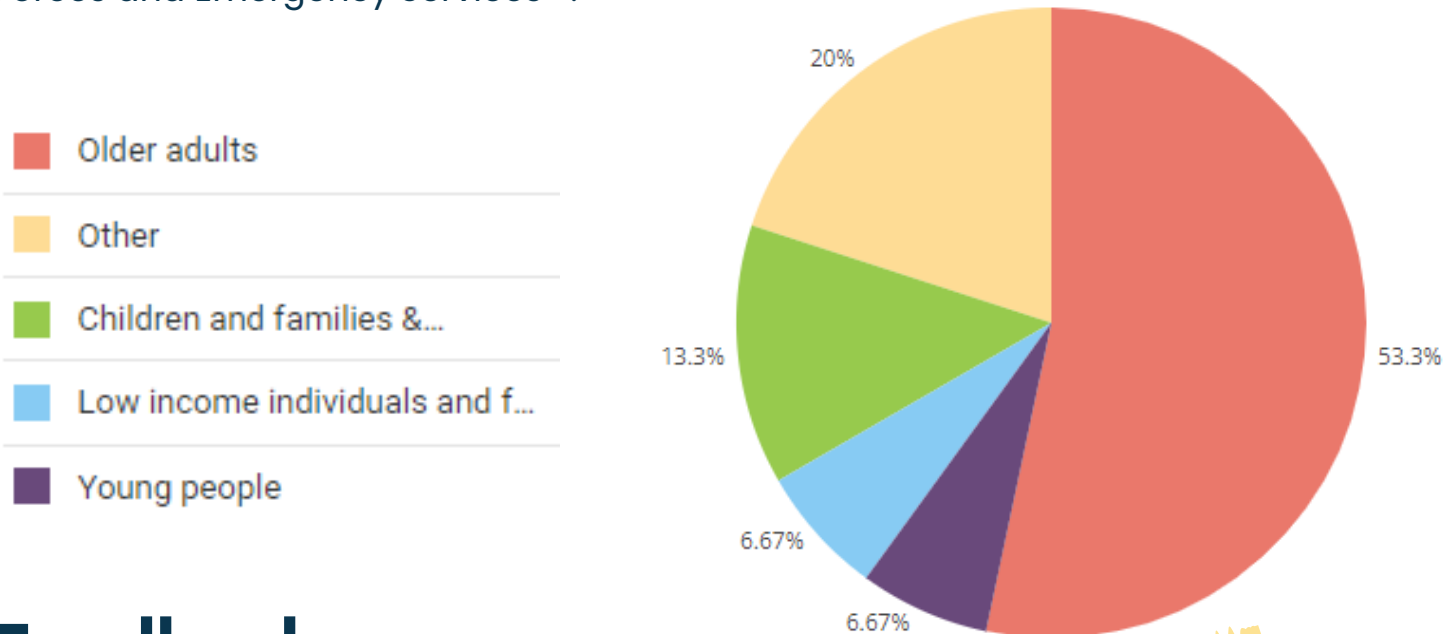
*I'm happy I could help. Your workshops have given me so much, it feels really nice to help make them happen. Let me know if you need more help in the future.*

*We became a very small close knit team. I think we began to enjoy our weekly meetings as much as our members.*



# Impact

The main beneficiaries were largely older adults, children and families. Other as per chart below were identified as middle age people, veterans, Armed Forces and Emergency Services :



# Feedback

*It helped me make new contacts/friends within our village*

*I'm here for my weekly therapy*

*Well worth doing. Good to get together. Lovely to meet people never met before who are our fellow villagers.*

*Starting earlier i.e. 'October' People of all ages have made new contacts/friends within our village and the feeling of being a Community is slowly returning after Covid 19.*

*I've never had lasagne before (boy aged 14)*

*We will continue to offer these social spaces throughout the year, and focus on soups/rolls for colder months.*

*It's so good having somewhere to come with the kids on a wet cold day at this time of the year. We are on our way back from town and it's the perfect time to pop in for a wee bit*

*Can my little brother come along just for food? (boy aged 14- family now connected to foodbank)*

*It's hard for my mum at home, free food on Friday evening's is a real help (girl aged 15)*

*Good quality meals good to have a place to eat and let kids play*

*Things like this make a big difference to me*

*I lost my Young Scot card and haven't eaten since breakfast (boy aged 13)*



# Making a difference

There is a Mother and Daughter who came together. The daughter receives support from two local charities due to her Mental Illness, and special needs.

A few months ago, she first came to a block of wellbeing art sessions we had delivered and it was the first time she had come to anything on her own. She was a bit terrified but got on great and loved it. Since then, she has come to a couple of one-off sessions that were for anyone open to the public, this shows building of confidence to come to sessions that are not specifically about mental health.

Then she came to these sessions with her Mum which was nice for them to share the creative journey. It was lovely seeing them get more social with other people and have fun together. These sessions were part of the journey of coming to more creative sessions in different venues and contexts for this young person.

Volunteering at the Sessions was a next step for the volunteer having been through a huge amount over the last couple of years and taking part in supportive sessions with us to see her volunteering was great for her confidence and she enjoyed it a lot.



If you focus on sickness,  
you're going to end up with  
doctors as the key actors. If  
you focus on **wellbeing**, you're  
going to end up with  
**communities** as key actors.

**Cormac Russell**

In one space, one gentleman had recently lost his wife and came often to have a meal as he struggled with cooking. He really appreciated this.

Another gentleman who lives alone had suffered a ankle fracture and struggled with mobility, he really benefitted from getting out a meeting others as part of his recovery.

Another individual who lacked so much confidence and struggle to attend groups is now now a regular attendee and is upset if a session is missed.

# Lessons Learned



## What worked well

- The meals available were good quality and appreciated by those who attended.
- Having time for food nurtured people and opened up more conversation.
- One organisation said that having 2 staff and a volunteer plus someone to help with the food was more staff than they normally have but it was great to make sure all participants were well supported and that the setup, clear up and food aspect were all very efficient.
- Having the sessions in the winter was great for people's mental health, some pointed out that it's harder to socialise, and fewer options don't involve pubs or restaurants.
- In terms of the application process: bureaucracy was reduced and the application process was simplified as most organisations were known by the Borders Community Action team. As a membership organisation, governing documentation may already be logged into Borders Community Action database. This also helps community development officers to run a 'health check' on applicants, offering further support as identified.
- Offering free food to all meant that young people could access without stigma.
- Some people were signposted to other support services such as foodbanks.
- The opportunity to work with other organisations and offer a holistic approach where people could be helped with a wide range of issues.

## What could have been better

- Funding came through later in the winter and drifted in to spring - starting earlier next time would give better preparation time and publicity to be circulated.
- It would be more efficient to have longer blocks or ideally run sessions all year round. This would make better value for money as there would be less marketing needed. Some participants reported feeling sad that it came to an end as everyone was having such a great time.
- In some of the young people's group, a real aversion to vegetables and a reluctance to try unknown or different food was experienced. Unsurprisingly, young people who were most in need, were those who were most frightened of food they didn't know.
- In future, a more targeted approach to include cookery sessions and food education to try and break down some of the barriers to eating healthy food could be explored.





# THANK YOU



The fund to Warm, Welcome Spaces was only possible due to the partnership work with Scottish Borders Health and Social Care Partnership and the National Lottery Community Fund as part of our joint response in preparing for winter pressures.

A special thanks to all volunteers, community groups and organisations who were able to mobilise action in a timely fashion in response to a community need.

- Royal British Legion (Scotland) Coldstream Branch
- Greener Peebles
- The Food Foundation
- Duns Fair Share
- Redpath Village Hall Ass
- St Abbs Community Council
- Tweeddale Youth Action
- Transform Arts CIC
- Leitholm, Eccles and Birgham Community Council on behalf of Leitholm Village Hall
- Brighter Blainslie Village Community Group supported by Blainslie Village Hall Committee.
- Southdean Hall
- FirstLight Trust
- Hawick Senior Citizens Association
- Lothian Hall
- Selkirk Cricket Club
- Ancrum Village Hall
- Yetholm Community Shop Limited
- Eddleston Village Hall



**Website:** [www.borderstsi.org.uk](http://www.borderstsi.org.uk)

**Email:** [info@borderscommunityaction.org.uk](mailto:info@borderscommunityaction.org.uk)