



Hello Friends!

We hope you are all keeping well and like ourselves, ready for some way overdue summer weather! As we write this, our Buddies are out on a morning excursion to make Acorn deliveries and a stop off for a little refreshment on their way back to Bolster HQ in Whitegates - life feels a little lighter already. We've had a couple of big announcements since our last newsletter, the most notable, our successful funding applications for both Autism Connect and Starbites 57 Social Café (covered in this newsletter).

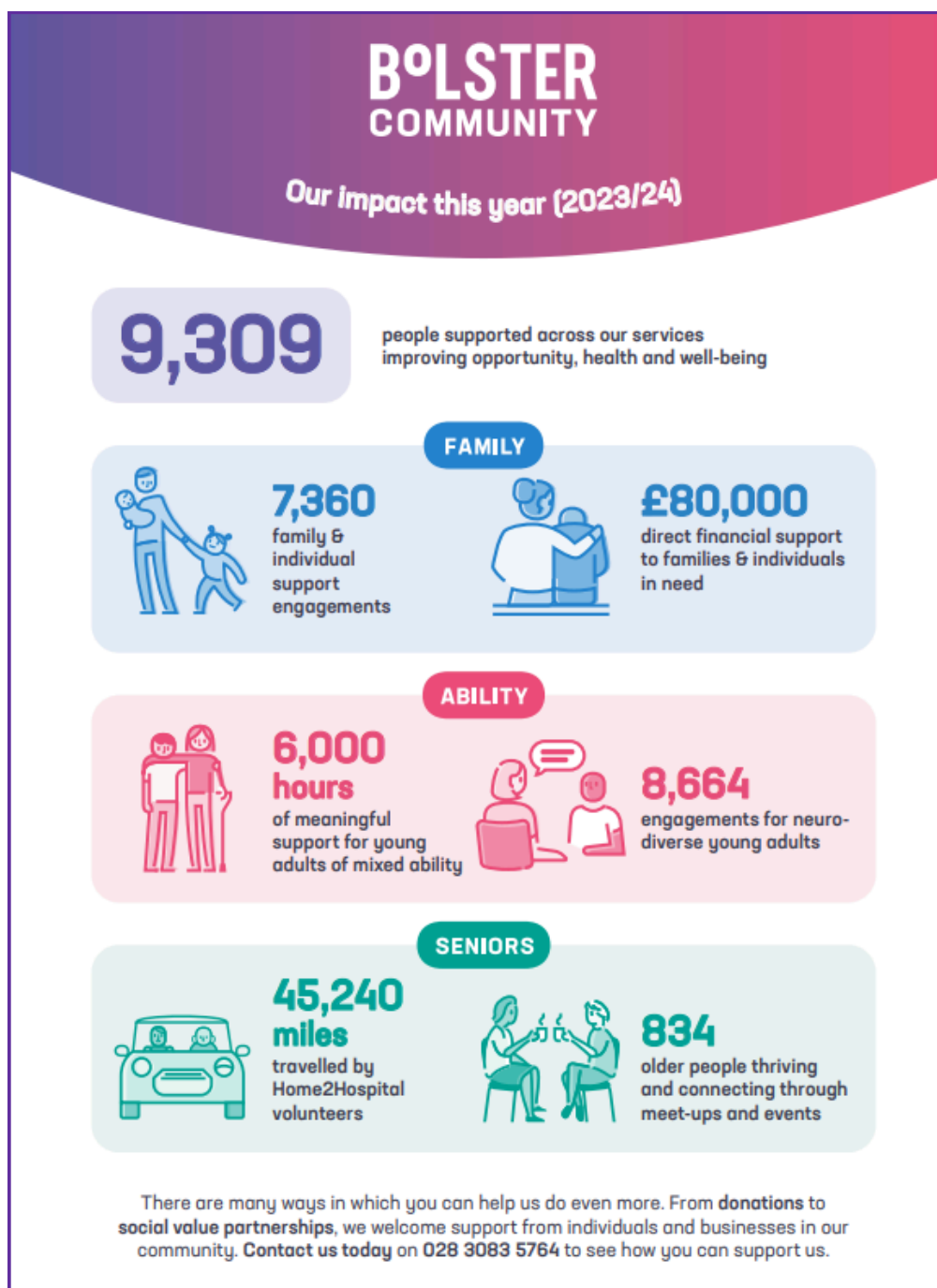
We've also been busy compiling our Annual Impact Report for 2023-2024 which has given us a chance to reflect on the Impact our organisation and dedicated staff has had over the previous 12 months. It is sometimes hard to appreciate what we have achieved, because we seem to be constantly doing and looking forward to what is coming up ahead.

Our CEO Jacinta Linden wrote, "Another year has gone by with lots to reflect and learn from amidst a challenging funding and cost of living context, referrals to our charity become more frequent and more urgent this year. Whilst the support requested became more complex and challenging, our staff, board and partners consistently rose to the occasion keeping our values and integrity to the fore.

We are eternally grateful however to the many generous individuals and companies who fundraise for us, who help put Christmas over for local children and families, to our funders and advocates and those kind people who ensure our most vulnerable have hope and many others access a warm home, a listening ear and a homecooked meal. To the local businesses who commissioned educational and emotional programmes for local children in crisis, to our statutory partners in the Southern Trust and the PHA and GP federation and our colleagues in the strategic stakeholder forum, DFC and NM&DDC council, for facilitating the hardship fund, and our Home2hospital service, thank you for making our work a little easier and the world a little better for so many ordinary people."

Jacinta

We are proud to present our 'Impact at a glance' extract for 2023/24.



Autism Connect Collaborative Partnership achieves funding success!

Our funding application to The National Lottery Community Fund towards the end of 2023 represented a major piece of work, with collaboration and partnership at its best - the insight and input from our statutory partners (The Southern Health & Social Care Trust and The GP Federation Multi-Disciplinary Team) - plus powerful input from our Autism Connect members and parents - made a funding proposal that just couldn't be ignored.

On Thursday 13th June, we celebrated with a launch at Stormont no less, the event kindly sponsored by Liz Kimmins MLA (host) and co-sponsored by Dianne Dodds MLA and Cathal Boylan MLA.

Statutory colleagues and supporters gathered to celebrate with us, including our Autism Connect Newry Group - thank you again to everyone who came, despite the weather!

Our new Autism Connect programme which launches this September, builds on an initial pilot programme that has been running since 2022 in Newry, however the new soon to be expanded service will offer autistic adults psychosocial supports across three locations, Armagh, Newry and Banbridge - and will complement and build on the existing Autism Connect project, whilst scaling participants numbers and expanding geographically.



Martina Flynn pictured

Martina Flynn, Vice Chair of Bolster Community Board said, "Whenever we first began our research into Autism support in the Southern Trust area, we never dreamt that within a few short years that we'd be launching a service at this scale, but here we are and rightfully so... now just 2 years on (from the launch of our Autism service pilot), Bolster Community in partnership with our colleagues at the Southern Trust and the MDT Team, and the incredible support from the National Lottery Community Fund - can now broaden the support on offer and help so many more Autistic Adults find community, connection and support within the Southern Trust."



Left to Right: Martina Flynn, Liz Kimmins, Jacinta Linden, Dr Ivor Crothers, Martina McAloon, Sinead Hughes & Maria McKevitt.



Left to Right (BR): Michael Savage, Liz Kimmins, Jacinta Linden, Dr Ivor Crothers, Martina Flynn, Paul Slevin. Left to Right (FR): Members of Autism Connect Newry Group with Orla Finnigan (Bolster Support Worker)

At the launch event, our CEO Jacinta Linden said, "To get to the house on the hill, with the lights on and a beating heart for autism, has been a dream come true for us. We're accidental Autism champions, that seems to be the way with Bolster, we react to the need, gather the evidence, meet the ask and deliver the programme in partnership - and we've been so blessed to find partnership and innovation with the Southern Trust, with the GP Federation, and with the National Lottery Community Fund who have committed £500K over 5 years to help us deliver the programme."

AUTISM CONNECT LAUNCH CELEBRATION - continued

Dr Ivor Crothers, Clinical Director Psychology Services SHSCT and Commissioner of Autism Connect (pictured above), elaborated on the achievements of the pilot so far saying, "...the project has already addressed many of the needs of the Autistic Community... namely an autistic centred safe space, where individuals can develop new skills, socialise, engage and grow together. From the pilot, the evidence that came out was clear with positive improvements for participants in terms of meaningful engagement, activities, communication skills, relationship building and emotional well-being. These outcomes are certainly to be commended, but of particular note...the improvements found in terms of participants confidence and self-esteem are really something that this project can be exceptionally proud of and should not be underestimated. These are providing vital road maps for understanding and navigating the complexities of the adult world, often where the lack of structure can be a major hindrance to people with autism."



Dr Ivor Crothers pictured

Commencing Summer 2024, the Autism Connect project has been designed to tackle the challenges that some autistic adults face. It will run across three locations - Newry, Armagh and Banbridge and is open to adults 18+ either with or awaiting an autism only diagnosis in the southern trust region, who are happy to travel to any of our three localities.

Services on offer will include:

1. Autism Connect Social - A weekly peer led social hub in each locality
2. My Mentoring - 1:1 and small group mentoring sessions
3. Autism & Me - 6-week psycho-social course for autistic adults and their parents/carers/partner or siblings (3 times per year in each locality)
4. Autism Annual - an annual networking/social event
5. The A List - An online resource of services, activities, events, and news.

Please contact us if you would like to make any enquiries on joining the group OR if you would like some of our Autism Connect flyers or posters - all support in spreading the word about this new service is appreciated!

Contact Bolster Community on 028 3083 5764.

BOLSTER COMMUNITY AUTISM CONNECT

Armagh Banbridge Newry

**A place of community,
connection & support
for adults who have,
or are awaiting, an
autism only diagnosis**

 **Contact us on
028 3083 5764**

Funded by



 **Southern Health
and Social Care Trust**
Quality Care - for you, with you

 **Newry & District**



AUTISM CONNECT LAUNCH CELEBRATION - continued

Emer Maguire, the amazingly talented musical/comedian and bbc presenter, provided a brilliant insight into her challenges as an autistic person, and in her introduction said, "So I'm autistic and I know there is a lot of support needed for autistic adults but a lot of times I feel like if you're an autistic adult without a learning disability, you really, really get left behind - and a lot of people don't actually understand the impact, that living as an autistic adult, and experiencing burnout, can have... people don't understand the difficulties behind the scenes, particularly if you think about adults who don't have a learning disability who have that more subtle mask presentation, who look like they get a long really, really well, in everyday life... those people are usually trying really, really hard to mask any difficulties."



Emer Maguire (pictured above) had the Autism Connect launch crowd in stitches with her amazing set!



Martina McAloon pictured

In closing the event, Liz Kimmins MLA and Chair of Health Committee, said "I can't explain how proud I am to host this event, we're often asked to co-sponsor events here at Stormont, particularly in my role as health spokesperson for Sinn Féin but also as Chair of the Health Committee, but nothing has excited me more than bringing Bolster here - and we've worked alongside Bolster for a long time, when they were previously Space, and I probably use Bolster as an example for everything that I do, every time I meet with a statutory body, any health meetings - Bolster - I think are leaders in terms of the work that they do... when they see a gap, when they see a need in our community, they work to meet that need - and what we are seeing and launching here today in terms of Autism Connect sums that up."

Martina McAloon, Multi-disciplinary Social Work Team lead (MDT, Newry) outlined the potential for new Autism Connect service saying "...together we can build a more inclusive society, where adults with autism are valued, supported and given opportunities to succeed. The demand for support and opportunities for adults with autism is increasing and addressing this need through GP Practices (via the MDT), is a proactive step towards better outcomes. Our new partnership approach, Bolster by dedicated funding, will enable tailored comprehensive care and resources that significantly improve quality of life for autistic adults. This initiative emphasises early interventional, personalised support and community exploration, ensuring everyone receives the support they need to thrive. MDT Social work, and myself, is proud to be involved in this project...By maintaining a strong focus, collaboration, and resources, we are dedicated to making a lasting impact and setting a new standard for support services for adults with autism."



Liz Kimmins pictured

STARBITES 57 - actively recruiting new NIHE Tenants!

Star-Bites 57 is our social KITCHEN funded by the Housing Executive which runs twice weekly every Monday and Thursday. Here we provide a relaxed welcoming space where the individuals come in, make themselves a cup of tea/ coffee, take a bite to eat and enjoy some social engagement or simple pre-planned activities.

"With Bolster Community I don't feel that shame."

Starbites/Social Kitchen Service User

Very often our social kitchen might be the only form of social interaction our attendees might have week to week, and one of the few places where they can get help with welfare and signposting - so it's a hugely important lifeline in alleviating isolation. Our service users have been very clear about just how important the service is to them...



In Feb 2024, we hosted a lovely afternoon tea in the Canal Court Hotel for our wonderful staff, volunteers, partner agencies, service users & board representatives to acknowledge the impact of our Starbites social Café and to celebrate 3yrs additional funding from the NIHE.

STARBITES 57

New tenants welcome! Places must be booked in advance by Joanne Caraher on 028 3083 5764

Are you a Housing Executive Tenant?

Join us for a free bite, cuppa and a chat. Catch up on the craic, browse the paper and enjoy any activities!

Our team will be there to help with any form-filling, appointment booking or signposting to local services that you may need.

When is it on?
Mondays and Thursdays from 10am to 1pm

Where is it on?
5-7 Marcus Street, Newry, BT34 1ET

"I have suicidal tendencies, I'm medicated and everything is ok... but sometimes the only way to pass this moment is to know that on Monday you have Bolster and you wait, wait, wait all over the weekend because on Monday your brain is going to change again and everything is going to be alright."

Starbites/Social Kitchen Service User

We would like to warmly encourage more NIHE Tenants to register to use this weekly support service, please share with any NIHE Tenants for whom this service may be useful!

 **Contact Bolster Community on 028 3083 5764.**

BOLSTER COMMUNITY + BUILDING FUTURES = HELPING LOCAL WOMEN LIKE AINE, REDISCOVER THEMSELVES!

BUILDING FUTURES - WHO IS IT FOR AND WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

Building Futures is a programme designed by women, for women who are looking at a fresh start and want to eventually get back into work. We have programmes running



throughout Newry, Mourne & Down over the coming months (restarting Sept 24), so please contact Justina or Tracy at Bolster Community for a chat if anything sounds appealing to you!

Aine's story

"Having recently retired from a permanent teaching job of 32 years and feeling that I had no future, Bolster and in particular, the Building Futures programme, opened up a new way of life for me...Through these programmes, I have got a joy of life back - there is a whole new world out there for me, not just the caring role for my gorgeous son who has a learning disability. I matter, and I have a role to play in my future. Bring on the next programme!"

The Building Futures programme is open to women aged 18+, currently unemployed and residing in Newry, Mourne & Down.

Contact Justina or Tracy at Bolster Community to have a chat on 028 3083 5764.

OUR SEPTEMBER 2024 PROGRAMMES INCLUDE:

Become a Classroom Assistant - next course Slieve Gullion/Sept '24:

If you are interested in becoming a **Classroom Assistant**, this bespoke programme will take you through the prep and planning to help you get there. With guest speakers from local schools, Paediatric First Aid, CV prep and mock interviews - you'll be ready to apply for teaching assistant roles.

This course also includes an **OCN qualification in Employability** and offers paths to further study if it is something you would like to pursue. Learn something new in a relaxed, friendly environment with like-minded women.

Developing Potential - next course Downpatrick/Sept '24:

Maybe you'd like to do a little self development, build up some confidence and map out a new path for yourself. Our Developing Potential course is the perfect place to start if you are feeling a little stuck and unsure of what to do!

Other courses available include:

- A 6 week **DIY course** from WOMENSTec, running in Slieve Gullion from Sept '24.
- An OCN in Carpentry from WOMENSTec running in Downpatrick from Sept '24.
- Discovery days and Entrepreneur courses with Women in Business N.I.

ACORN

SCENTS OF ACHIEVEMENT

Bolster Buddies & Acorn - Growing side by side!

With funding opportunities becoming increasingly contested in recent years, we've had to proactively look at ways to generate income that can support our work, and this is where our Social Enterprise 'Acorn' comes in.

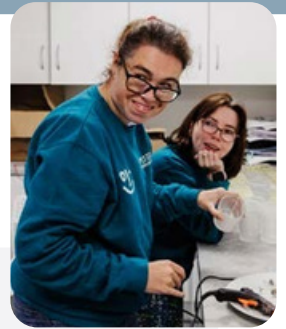
Not only does Acorn give meaningful opportunities for young adults of mixed abilities, it helps them establish and work towards personal goals, developing friendships and skills along the way. The profits, albeit modest in scale, all go back into helping us continue our work in the community. #GiftsWithPurpose

Our Buddies are all very proud of their candle work, from helping with production, to meeting customers in the Whitegates shop or out on deliveries to one of our growing list of stockists across retail, wholesale and corporate customers.

It really is amazing to see our Buddies Service and Acorn continue to grow side by side, especially evident in the last year!

Support us by
becoming a stockist or
buying from Acorn for
your Corporate Gifts

Reach out to us at
acorn@bolstercommunity.org
and our team will be
delighted to help,



APRIL 2023

7 Bolster Buddies

Providing approx. 188hrs of monthly support

MARCH 2024

19 Bolster Buddies!

Providing approx. 726hrs of monthly support

6,000 hours of meaningful disability support provided this year!



Exciting news!!!!

Did someone say, new candles?!

Like any business, we strive to keep our product range fresh, and are delighted to be launching a collection of very special candles in July 2024! Keep your eyes peeled, as they just might be our favourite scents yet, in addition to the beautiful Moments candle launched earlier this year.



A social enterprise operated by

**BOLSTER
COMMUNITY**



028 3083 5764



acorn@bolstercommunity.org



acornshop.co.uk



[@acorncandles](https://www.instagram.com/acorncandles)



Unit 1 Whitegates Business Park
Newry, BT35 6UA



5-7 Marcus Street
Newry, BT34 1ET



18 Newcastle Street
Kilkeel, BT34 4AF

BOLSTER COMMUNITY - SNAP SHOTS (JUNE 2024)



[Above] Annie Clarke and Deirdre McGill (SHSCT Promoting Wellbeing Team) in absolute cahoots at Emer Maguire's side splitting set at our Autism Connect launch event in June '24. :)



[Above] Our first LADWISE programme funded by the Newry & Mourne GP's Federation wrapped in June 2024 with an outing to 'Formula Karting' in Newry for the final session (along with Pizza and some Euro's football afterwards at Bolster). The feedback has been brilliant with one parent saying her son "thoroughly enjoyed the group, definitely helped his confidence, a far happier boy, thank you!" We look forward to sharing more in our next newsletter.



[Above & Right] On Monday 24th June our Buddy's hosted a fab Jumble Sale & coffee morning at Whitegates, raising just over £1,000 for Bolster Community!! A-MAZ-ING!!!!



[Left] Fergal and Bailey get a taste of the limelight on our recent June photoshoot for our new Acorn Candles Launch!! Keep your eyes peeled for the big launch in July 2024.



[Right] Bolster Buddy Patrick gets green fingered, making sure our new planters are nice and full!

