

# BOLSTER COMMUNITY

Get through & get ahead

Annual Report 2020

Charity No 107382 | Company No 655061



INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE

Accredited  
Until 2021





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**We are a charity and social enterprise that offers practical support for individuals and families, helping them to get through and get ahead.**

Sometimes we all need a little help and when you do, Bolster Community has your back. Bolster Community is a not-for-profit organisation with offices in Newry and Kilkeel. We're a practical, hands-on charity that works alongside individuals, families and communities to help them get through and get ahead.

Since 2004, we've had the privilege of helping countless individuals reach their full potential. From early years right through to later years, we support and strengthen people facing life's tough challenges. Bolster Community (previously known as SPACE NI), has grown from a small campaigning organisation in Warrenpoint, to a key third sector agency providing services, support, training and leadership on community development, resilience and well-being.

Our services are centred around supporting three categories – **Family, Ability and Seniors.**

**Our Services**

FAMILY	SENIORS	ABILITY
Newry & Mourne Family Support Hub	Mourne Home2Hospital	Social Enterprise Opportunities
1-1 Home-based Family Support	Slieve Gullion Home2Hospital	Acorn Candle Making
Evidence Based Programmes for parents and children	Diamond Days	Bolster Connections
Summer Scheme & Activity sessions for children	Comfort Zone	1-1 Disability Home-based Family Support
Kilkeel SureStart	Pharmacy Deliveries	Supported Family Day
Early Intervention Support Service	COVID-19 Support Calls	
Networking & Information Events		
Prevention of Homelessness Navigator Project		

**A message from the Chairperson**



**Eamonn Connolly  
Chairperson Bolster Community 2020**

Welcome to Bolster Community 2020 annual report, I hope you will take the time to read through the achievements and highlights contained in this report and concur that 2020 has been an exceptional year for the staff, board and beneficiaries at Bolster Community.

Early in 2020, none of us had any idea of just how challenging the year would become and yet the team of dedicated staff at Bolster Community went way beyond their duty to provide service support and succour to many who found themselves in need of a helping hand.

As Chairman of Bolster Community, I was impressed with how quickly the team pivoted to develop a vibrant, visible presence for those most in need within our community. I watched as staff found ways to get more business done whilst constantly doing good and finding ways to work smarter and become more efficient.

We know that third sector organisations do not operate in a vacuum; they work in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders and partners. Over the last 12 months we have come to realise the many benefits of collaborative problem solving and resource building. In a year that challenged the most hardened of business people, this small, ambitious team dealt with a 70% increase in referrals whilst coping with the loss of 90% of generated income. In 2020, Bolster Community somehow managed to rebrand, find new premises, refurbish those premises, develop new services and move into their new home in Whitegates Business Centre in April 2021.

Ultimately 2020 brought a lot of good will from individuals and the wider business community to Bolster Community with generous funding also received through the Department of Communities Social Enterprise fund and The National Lottery Charities fund, the NIHE and SHSCT.

2020 has been a year like no other, many people in our community are still struggling to deal with loss and grief and ill health and poverty!

Tony Robbins once said **“You see, in life, lots of people know what to do, but few people actually do what they know. Knowing is not enough! You must take action”.**

I'm delighted to say that the Bolster team, led from the front by Jacinta, faced the unprecedented challenges of the last year with unrelenting resolve and through their efforts many people benefited.

I'm looking forward to chairing Bolster Community in 2021 and contributing to building back stronger and building back social!

**Over the last 12 months we have come to realise the many benefits of collaborative problem solving and resource building.**

# A message from the CEO



**Jacinta Linden**  
CEO, Bolster Community

**What a year! Seriously, was it really just one year? We entered 2020 buoyed with energy and hope for the year ahead, a year when we would dig deep to develop our service reach and take our social enterprise to the next level. Or so we thought...**

We all know what happened next. In March 2020, we received the hard cold rules, no mingling, essential journeys only, wash your hands, wear a mask. Throughout the early stages of lockdown in 2020, we clapped for carers, we moved our work online and debated about roads to walk and hills to climb. We swapped Grannies recipes and made banana bread whilst all the time missing the familiar, missing the dreams and the plans. In some way, we all we went back to basics. We started to value a simple hello or a chance meeting with a friend or neighbour on our daily walk. We became a little more tolerant, a little more in awe of the natural beauty around us, we became a little more kind.

As lockdown continued, the real effects started to set in. Children missed school, missed playing with friends, engaging in sports, missed living. At work, we witnessed many more calls for help from people isolated and beyond their tether in homes impacted by poverty, low mood, grief and caring for others, particularly those at risk or living with a disability. Our older people became scared, lonely and withdrew, as per instruction, to protect themselves and each other. Many people were forced to spend more time than they cared to at home, others had to stay for longer in relationships that were no longer healthy for them. Families we know will carry the trauma of watching loved ones get ill and pass away without a touch, a hug or a proper send off.

Looking back, it is easy for me to recall the date on which I knew we were in for a bumpy ride - March 23rd. I received an email about the impact of lockdown on services. When I responded to that email, I got more out of office messages than I have ever received - for me it was clear. So many people had already been furloughed whilst others had been forced to close up. Knowing that many services were now withdrawn due to government advice spurred our team on to do more.



**At Bolster Community, we have always been about the collective response, no one agency or person can fix everything, we can do so much more when we work in partnership.**

During COVID-19 we had over 24,000 engagements with families, older people and children. We made sure we were quickly able to meet the needs and requirements of the communities we support.

Our Family Support Workers cooked, baked, shopped, supported and became small screen supporters to many children & parents by delivering cooking demos and coming up with ways to keep kids entertained at home. We became loneliness busters, a much needed bridge with and between people, community and needs.

Over the next 9 months staff and board at Bolster Community continued to go the extra mile to provide practical assistance to ordinary people who found themselves in extraordinary situations. Our Kindness Kits took off and every Friday night the Kindness team swooped in to deliver them to those in need. Facebook became a repository for kindness, where ordinary people nominated and celebrated everyday heroism.

Parents seeking help from the Family Support Hub reported heightened anxiety at home, many struggled with boundaries and rebellious teens. Others impacted by the loss of a loved one were juggling so many challenges, sometimes an outsider was needed to provide a listening ear. Our work moved to longer days, longer nights, weekend and flexible reactionary work so that those in need could be supported when children slept or home-schooling ended. During the year, the Newry and Mourne Family Support Hub received 256 referrals and related work was busier than ever. Bolstering others to get through and get ahead is a good reflection of how we need to support our community in the coming months and years. This is especially true considering the increased needs and demands on families with caring responsibilities for older relatives or children with additional needs.



As we stumbled through 2020, we dealt with a 70% increase in demand for services, the greatest demand for help we have ever witnessed. Many local people impacted by redundancy, furlough, loss of income had no alternative but turn to charity for help. As we neared Christmas, it was clear we did not have enough funds in the tank to support the level of need coming at us, families needed oil, clothes, cookers, fridges, every phone call and referral was checked through and recommendations made for toys, curtains, food, oil - whatever it took to get people through the winter. The festive period was when Community Champions began to emerge. Our staff collectively raised over £6000 in our 2.6km challenge back in May and Anthony Duffy Warrenpoint kindly stepped in and did a live head shave! I value and respect the relationships and support with our Board, funders, partner agencies, we could not do half as much as we do, so sincere thanks to the National Lottery



fund, the Southern Trust, Public Health Agency, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Newry Mourne and Down District Council and the Department for Communities. At Bolster Community, we have always been about the collective response, no one agency or person can fix everything, we can do so much more when we work in partnership.

COVID-19 served a devastating blow for charities across Northern Ireland and 2020 has really forced many organisations to rethink how they operate. Over the past sixteen years, our organisation has been steadfast in strengthening and supporting our community with its practical, people-first support services. Working in conjunction with existing partner services, Bolster Community continues to make a huge impact to people's lives at a time when it's needed most. In May 2020 we revisited our values and set out to find a new home. Our previous facility in Newry was restricted as it was over three floors and proved difficult for some of our attendees with access issues, so we began a process of reviewing our brand and our purpose. We rebranded from SPACE-NI to Bolster Community. Bolster is an old word, a return to old values where neighbours and community could be depended on to help each other and make things better. That's exactly what we are committed to doing.

For now, I'm going to sign off, I feel privileged to work with the team of staff and management board. I love being part of a caring, giving community within Newry, Mourne and Down. Here's looking forward to a bit of recovery for all in 2021. We have survived a tsunami of challenge, change and growth. It's time now, as we move into our new premises at Whitegates Newry, to pause before rebooting to undertake some more brilliant work supporting others! In fairness, we will all need time to recover from 2020. We will all need time to let off steam and celebrate the ordinary wonder of life again. That time will come, for now though, we approach recovery in a gentle, "easy steps" approach. We daren't dream too big or for too much, our hope is that 2021 will be a year to take stock and rebuild. And we're sure we'll have plenty of joy and positivity to spread along the way.

Best wishes,  
Jacinta Linden



**COVID-19 served a devastating blow for charities across Northern Ireland and 2020 has really forced many organisations to rethink how they operate.**

## Supporting the community through COVID-19

**"Bolster Community has been a huge support to our family throughout the pandemic - not only supporting my family, but also assisting my parents and extended family members"**

Bolster Community Participant

**24,000**

Engagements with participants

**7,000**

Engagements with seniors

**12,000**

Engagements with families

**5,000**

Engagements with children and young people of mixed ability

### CASE STUDY

**D**uring COVID-19 Sean and Kathy lost their home as work dried up and they were not eligible for any of the support packages put in place. For many weeks Bolster Community delivered weekly food parcels, vouchers, heating oil and when Christmas came they helped by supplying toys and even Christmas dinner. Bolster Community also put them in contact with a debt advisory service to help them get their credit cards under control. Sean and Kathy got through Christmas with the help of Bolster, and the smiles on their children's faces made everything better.

# Celebrating the success of National Lottery Community Fund Family Support Project



2020 saw us come to the end of our five-year National Lottery Funded Family Support Project.

In 2014 we consulted with families across Newry, Mourne and Down and asked what they needed to make families feel supported, secure and successful. We took their advice and put a proposal to the National Lottery Community Fund and in October 2015 we launched SPACE1 Family Support project. We are so grateful to the National Lottery for their continued support.

15,000

Hours of home-based support

1,856

Parents and children participated in training and activities

95%  
OF ADULTS

85%  
OF CHILDREN

Reported improved family relationships  
(Family Evaluation Forms)

## Outcome One

More families with children under 12 feel supported and confident to cope with adversity and note improved family relationships



## Outcome Two

Due to the support provided by this project, more families with children under 12 will report enhanced parenting skills to better support their children



## Outcome Three

Due to the support provided by this project, more parents with children under 12 report a more stable situation at home and as a result now engage in community-based parenting activity

## Outcome Four

More families/children and agencies report improved access and awareness of local and regional programmes for supporting parents, children and families

95%  
OF PARENTS

Reported they were better able to manage family routines and behaviours  
(Family Star Plus measurement tool)





# What changed?

At Bolster Community we measure the impact of our work with children and families using Outcome Star.

The Outcome Star is a family of evidence-based tools that measure and support change when working with people. It is a unique and innovative way for frontline services to demonstrate their impact whilst influencing and improving keywork. We use Family Star Plus for working with families and My Star when working directly with children.

**98%**  
of Parents recorded progress in meeting the emotional needs of their children

**88%**  
of Parents recorded progress and maintaining routines within the family

**77%**  
of families recorded progress in boundaries and behaviours within the household

“I can’t put it into words the difference the support has made to me. The support for the whole family - myself in particular. It has been brilliant and it has taken the pressure off at a time when I really needed it. I can’t thank you enough - the support has been invaluable.”

Jackie, Mum of 4 who received home-based support



# The financial impact of COVID-19 on families

Christmas 2020 saw a 77% increase in requests for financial support from the previous year, and we knew we couldn't meet this demand on our own.

Out of the blue local man **Ernie Campbell** turned up without a white horse, saying how can I help? 250 presents later we were blown away by this one man's campaign of kindness and giving.

**Gorman's Bar and Restaurant, Mayobridge** and **The Church Restaurant, Rostrevor** followed suit and over November and December **Barry, Colin, Colum, Eimear** and **Mairead** wrapped presents, sourced goods and generally became our Santa Claus! These guys with no connection to Bolster Community stepped up to the plate and will be forever in our thoughts for helping us deliver Christmas and wellbeing to 366 families! Right up to Christmas day we were busy delivering meals and toys. **Northstone Materials** donated a drop off of quality toys close to Christmas. Other local heroes emerged, **Brian Reid** from **Deli Lites** saw some of the activity happening locally and offered meals and snacks to those who otherwise would have gone hungry.

It wasn't all businesses though - we received donations from individuals and families too. They donated food hampers, toys and money to our appeal and thanks to these local heroes, we were absolutely blessed to be in a position to support them right up to Christmas Eve and into January 2021.

**"I really appreciate all the support I received and would have been lost without Bolster Community."**

Beneficiary, Newry & Mourne Family Support Hub

"After finding out about the Family Support Hub from my local councillor, I made a referral for financial support as we were struggling in the run up to Christmas to support my family.

I was contacted by Bolster Community and was able to confide in them about the struggles I was facing due to the current circumstances. We had to flee our family home and ended up some distance from the local town. I didn't drive which made things difficult and I relied on public transport which added to the regular household bills. I have 5 children one of who has Autism. With changes to benefits and the pandemic household bills were much higher than normal.

Bolster Community provided food parcels, vouchers, basic essentials, heating oil for the house and were able to replace my washing machine. We have now been offered a new home back in town which will help with my financial situation to reduce the pressure."

**£39,000**

in Financial Support

**366**

families, older people  
and homeless benefited  
from our Christmas appeal



**"Bolster Community has been a lifeline to our family, and we can't thank you enough for having Stephen attend a couple of days a week and providing such wonderful opportunities for him. Everyone's lives have been disrupted by COVID-19, but for families with disabled children and vulnerable adults it is particularly worrying. Stephen being able to come back to the workshop means the world to us."**

Marty O'Hanlon, father of Stephen, one of our superb candle makers



# Introducing Friends Resilience

2020 was a very difficult year for everyone. Children, in particular, had the the rug pulled from under them.

With the loss of routine and distance from friends and peers, children became increasingly worried and anxious. During the year, 37% of requests for support made to the Newry and Mourne Family Support Hub were for children and young people suffering from emotional and behavioural issues.

Since 2016, we have seen a steady increase in referrals of this nature and in response we became licenced facilitators of the FRIENDS programmes. Based on Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), FRIENDS has been recognised by the World Health Organisation as the only evidence based programme effective in reducing anxiety as a universal and targeted intervention (WHO, 2004).



FRIENDS empowers children to cope with the emotions of themselves and others by engaging with positive thoughts, feelings, and self-regulation strategies. The program also teaches creative alternatives to solving problems that children might have previously shyed away from, fostering the development of confidence and self-esteem. Most importantly, FRIENDS encourages SMILING, HAPPINESS and BRAVERY, and facilitates smooth transitions into adolescence.

During 2020, Bolster Community ran FRIENDS programmes back to back and a total of 97 participants completed the programmes. We are passionate about the quality and integrity of this programme and the team have worked tirelessly and creatively to ensure that we have been able to reach as many children in need during this pandemic.

## About the programme

The FRIENDS programmes are a series of resilience programmes developed by Professor Paula Barrett, a scholar and researcher in the field of child psychology.

A study by the National Behavioural Support Service in Ireland trialled FRIENDS with first year cohorts in 14 post primary schools and found it effective in promoting positive behaviour. Before the programme, 18.8% of the 244 participants rated themselves within the 'elevated' anxiety level. This reduced to 10.2% following completion of the 'FRIENDS for Life' programme. Continued improvement has been recorded following completion of the two booster sessions four months later. <https://www.nbss.ie/node/398>

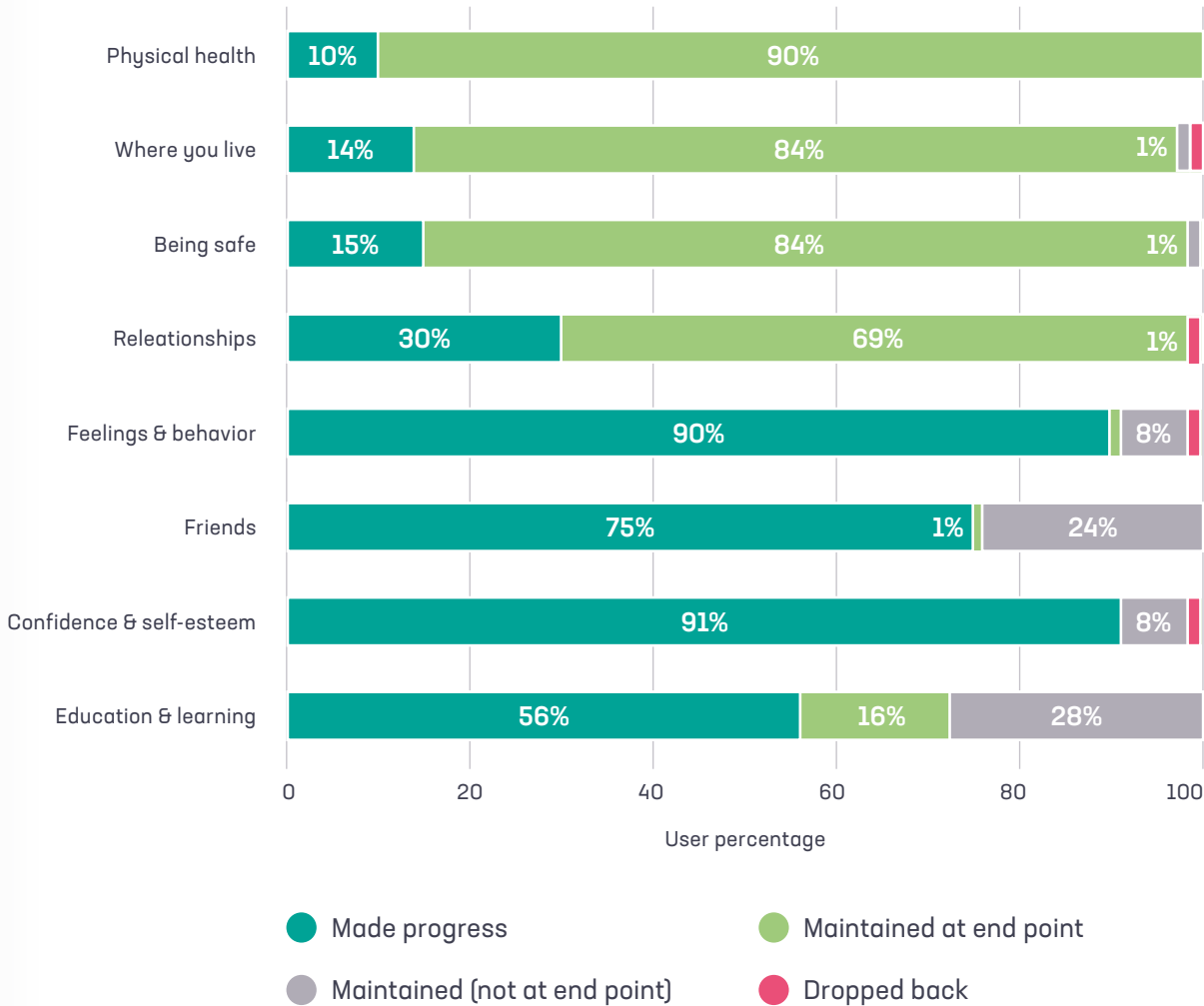
Anxiety is the most common psychological disorder in school-aged children and adolescents. Prevalence rates in Ireland estimate that 18.7% of children suffer from some form of mental health issue or psychological disorder, including anxiety severe enough to cause impairment. (Barnardo's Report, Tomorrow's Child 2008)

FRIENDS encourages SMILING, HAPPINESS and BRAVERY, and facilitates smooth transitions into adolescence.

# My Star Report



We measure the impact of our work with children and families using MyStar. MyStar is an evidence-based tool that measures and supports change when working with people.



## CASE STUDY

Macey had not been able to attend school for two terms as her anxiety was so high. Her family were really worried as she was due to move into secondary school at the end of the year and they were not sure how she would cope. After receiving one to one support and completing FRIENDS for Life she was able to return to school part-time and after a few weeks was back in full-time.

# Social Enterprise @ Bolster Community

## Acorn Products Go Global!

2020 presented our social enterprise, Acorn Products, with new challenges and opportunities. The onset of COVID-19 meant sales through our retail outlets dropped significantly and we responded by developing our online shop <https://bolstercommunity.org/shop/> Now you can buy your Acorn candles and soaps from the comfort of your own home. There was great excitement on the morning we received an order from California!

2020 saw us develop new relationships with corporate customers, Kehoe Kars (Newry) and Deanery Demesne (Newry). Anyone buying a car from John and team or a lovely new house in exclusive Deanery Demesne will receive a special gift of a handmade soy candle made by our lovely candlemakers.

As normal, Christmas proved to be the busiest time for Acorn. Just in time for the “silly” season, we introduced handmade, vegan friendly soaps to our candle range. For six weeks Kathy, Noreen and the Acorn Team were as busy as Santa’s elves pouring, labelling, wrapping and posting orders to all across UK and Ireland. We received so many thank you emails and calls from delighted employees who received surprise hampers in the post from their employers and our products also appeared alongside other social enterprise products in beautiful hampers produced by Storybook. We are so grateful to everyone who added Acorn Products to their Christmas gift list this year.

However it wasn't all good, very quickly during the first lockdown we realised that the mental health of our lovely candlemakers was being deeply affected by the isolation and lack of structure that lockdown brought. We arranged weekly bingo, music and games via Zoom and for those most vulnerable we opened the workshop for 1-1 sessions.

During this difficult time our Kindness Kits were born. We delivered hundreds of hampers packed with cakes, candles, art materials, cosmetics, magazines to those we knew needed a little pick-me-up. Soon members of the public were contacting us to nominate friends and neighbours, as word spread our little gifts of kindness appeared in the Irish News.

2021 will no doubt also have its challenges, but we are ready to tackle whatever it may throw at us. As one of our lovely volunteers told us recently, “Once you choose hope, anything is possible.”

Thank you to all our private and corporate customers



**Acorn products are all handmade in Newry by young adults with additional needs. All proceeds from sales support our charitable services.**

**81%**

Would definitely purchase our products again

**83%**

Stated they made their purchase to support a local charity and to buy local

**100%**

Said they got value for money from their purchase



## Supporting Ability @Bolster Community

Our Ability services are dedicated to enabling children and young adults of mixed ability to reach for the stars. We are especially proud of our Social Enterprise and online gift shop, a safe place for our volunteers to feel connected, valued and purposeful.

We are delighted that in 2020 we were able to launch Bolster Connections, a programme for children of mixed ability and their families funded by The National Lottery Community Fund NI. This was launched in Nov 2020 and has 69 children from 29 families registered to take part. This programme will give children of mixed ability a chance to socialise with others along with their siblings.

We have also extended our Family Support service to offer support, connect families with a child of mixed ability to access community and voluntary supports in the Armagh and Dungannon area, funded by the Southern Health and social Care Trust. Services will include navigation & signposting, practical support and social activities to meet the needs of the family.

**1,859**

**hours of support was provided for children and adults with disability**

### CASE STUDY

**S**inead would stay in her room most days. She felt anxious at the thought of going outside and meeting people. Her family support worker told her about Bolster Community where she could come to the workshop to make candles and socialise with people like her. Sinead has been attending Bolster for two years now. She loves making Acorn candles and especially enjoys gift wrapping hampers for special events. Her mum says coming to Bolster Community gives Sinead a purpose and some structure in her life, and Sinead always has a story from work to talk about at the dinner table.



# Seniors @Bolster Community

SENIORS



## Seniors are right at the heart of Bolster Community.

From day one, when we first started as South Down Family Health Initiative in Warrenpoint, it was important to us that we supported our senior community and never was this more needed than during 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic.

As our elderly population stayed home and became more isolated and separated from families, our team donned PPE and keeping within government guidelines, we made sure that we kept close to those most vulnerable in our community. Staff delivered food, weekly shopping and medication and we made weekly phone calls, just for a chat and check in that all was well. There were online quizzes, newsletters delivered to the door, Easter Eggs and Kindness Kits left on doorsteps, just letting them know we cared.

Most importantly, our amazing team of volunteer drivers carried on the service ensuring that anyone who needed to get to hospital was delivered safely, on-time and had someone there to listen to their fears and worries on the way there and home again. It may have looked different with screens fitted to cars, drivers in masks and the overwhelming scent of sanitizer, but each recipient knew we were there for them at the most frightening of times.

Moving into 2021 we are hopeful that we will soon be able to meet up face to face and that our weekly social groups, Comfort Zone and Diamond Days will be welcoming our seniors through the doors once again.

### CASE STUDY

**W**hen Tom was diagnosed with cancer and told he would need to travel from his home in Crossmaglen to Belfast five days per week for six weeks he didn't know what to do. Tom is seventy, a widower and lives alone. His family all had full time jobs and could take him some of the time but not all. His sister rang Bolster Community to ask if we could help and a volunteer driver was identified who drove him down three days each week. Tom was able to meet all his appointments.

**42,000**  
miles travelled to  
out of area hospital  
appointments.

**1,156**  
Home2Hospital volunteer  
driver hours

**1,044**  
keeping in touch calls

**520**  
prescriptions and  
grocery deliveries

**150**  
Kindness Kits and  
Christmas Meals

**7,130**  
hours of social activities

**£39,000**  
in Financial Support

# The people who make it all happen

## Meet the board

Eamonn Connolly	Paul Slevin
Martina Flynn	Judith McConville
Julie White	Gerry Flynn
Paul Farquhar	Connor Sweeney

The Bolster Community board is representative of the community we support. Our board has evolved with the organisation with some members having been beneficiaries of our services. Others joined the board after a public recruitment appeal for professional support skills including accountancy, law, finance and human resources

## Management Team

Jacinta  
Allison

## Programmes / Training and Admin Team

Joanne  
Tracy  
Aine  
Kathy  
Tom

From right: Eamonn Connolly, Chairperson  
with Corporate Customer John Kehoe, Kehoe Cars



## Kilkeel SureStart Team

Pauline  
Rita  
Caoimhe  
Annamarie  
Kerri

## Support Team

Kate  
Noreen  
Gemma  
Cailin  
Jena  
Catriona

## Our Volunteers

Like most charities, Bolster Community would not be able to deliver the vital services we do without volunteers.

**In 2020 volunteers provided 3,629 hours of support! Equating to a financial contribution of £54,435**

We have a fabulous team of volunteers who range in age from 15-70 who do everything including just being there when we need them! Each volunteer brings their own unique skills, enthusiasm and ability, some help with our Social Enterprise, some with Family Support and others provide transport and company to Home2Hospital users.



"I choose to volunteer with Bolster Community as I enjoy working with children and the summer camp was an opportunity to bring out the inner child in me! I enjoyed participating and encouraging the children through various fun activities. Volunteering has been beneficial for my CV in demonstrating teamwork and leadership skills."

Amy Turley

# Thank You

As a not-for-profit community-based organisation, we rely on the support of funders, volunteers, advocates, support organisations and donors to support us in our mission. We are very grateful to the general public and local businesses whose continued goodwill and support has enabled us to continue helping local families through tough times over the past 16 years. We stay committed to helping people get through and get ahead.





# B°LSTER COMMUNITY

Connect with us



[bolstercommunity.org](https://bolstercommunity.org)