

VOLUME 18: JUNE 2025

BOLSTER COMMUNITY Newsletter



This Newsletter is funded by:



Southern Health
and Social Care Trust

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF IMPACT

As we celebrate two decades of dedication to our community, we're honored to share the stories of the people who've made it all possible. From those we've supported to the volunteers and staff who've given their hearts and time, every story is a testament to the power of compassion and community.

Over the past 20 years, we've worked tirelessly to provide support when it's needed most. Our journey is marked by countless moments of hope, resilience, and transformation. As one of our parents shared, "I feel the future is definitely brighter. I know there are organisations like Bolster that will help us and give us the support we need if we do struggle again. But they've given us a fishing rod and taught us how to use it, so we're going to be able to be more independent in the future."

Our commitment to strengthening communities and touching lives has only grown stronger with time. "Bolster Community's 20-year milestone is a testament to the incredible dedication of our staff, volunteers, and supporters," says Jacinta Linden, CEO. "We're proud of what we've achieved, but we're just getting started. We hope to reach even more people in Newry & Mourne, ensuring everyone knows they can turn to us for support when they need it most."

As we look to the future, we're filled with hope and determination. We envision a community where everyone has access to the support they need to thrive. We'll continue to work tirelessly towards this goal, driven by the stories of those we've helped and the knowledge that together, we can make a real difference.

"There's good people in Bolster. The best of people. It's a good spot and good for Newry city. Bolster is a place where they help a lot of people. They give them another life back. I like to see young people happy in life because I wasn't a happy person all those years when I was battling drink. I'm happy now. I have my own place and I'm back with the family. I'm doing great. I'm just getting on with it, a day at a time." (Gerard Larkin)

Real lives, Real Stories

To celebrate our 20 years, we are very proud to share our new photo-essay exhibition which shares just some of the voices and stories of those who have been at the heart of Bolster over the years - you can take in this exhibition at our Buttercrane pop-up from Fri 13th June to Fri 20th June, with more locations to be announced. Follow us on socials to also see our short series of videos, where our participants have very kindly agreed to share their stories first hand. We are so grateful you have entrusted us to share your stories and we know they will only inspire more people to take the first step in reaching out for or accepting help.

Have you tried Bolster?

We need your help to ensure as many people as possible in Newry & Mourne know about the support we offer. Share our socials, services and new programmes with your friends and family. Together, we can make sure everyone knows they can turn to Bolster Community for support when they need it most. Thank you for being part of our journey. Here's to many more years of making a difference!



Gerard is just one of those featured in our **Real Lives, Real Stories** exhibition

“The Right Place” Conference Sparks Hope for Autistic Adult Housing



On Thurs 22nd May, we gathered for “The Right Place Conference” - an event which brought together parents, housing specialists, support organisations, local authorities, and advocates to tackle one of the most pressing and under-addressed issues in the neurodivergent community: where and how autistic adults can live fulfilling, independent lives.

Hosted in an atmosphere brimming with warmth, collaboration, and energy, the conference was a powerful platform for discussion, connection, and shared vision with one parent sharing, “This event makes me hopeful about my daughter’s future...for the first time, I don’t feel so alone navigating these challenges.”

Attendees had the chance to engage directly with service providers, developers, and care specialists. Topics ranged from supported living models and funding pathways to inclusive design and tenant rights. In response, professionals offered insight into innovative housing approaches, including co-housing communities, tech-assisted independence, and transitions from residential care into more autonomous living environments. Deputy Lord Mayor Councillor Kyle Savage addressed the conference, emphasising the need for inclusive, collaborative planning. “Housing is more than bricks and mortar - it’s about dignity, independence, and the right to thrive,” he said.

“This isn’t just about housing. It’s about belonging.”

Feedback was hugely positive with many attendees expressing a renewed sense of hope, solidarity, and direction. “This isn’t just about housing,” said one speaker. “It’s about belonging. It’s about saying: you deserve to live somewhere that feels like home.”

While the day brought valuable connection and insight, it also underscored the gaps in current housing options, which often fail to meet the complex needs of autistic adults. There are no easy solutions, but the event sparked a shared commitment to finding inclusive, responsive approaches.



We were delighted that advocate Grainne Evans shared her experiences and challenges accessing housing and why it was so important to her. Thank you Grainne!

Become a Foster Care Community Champion



Being a Champion may involve

- organising an information event in your local area, in partnership with us
- linking in with your local schools, shops, sports clubs, leisure centres, businesses or other venues to display and/or share promotional material or social media content
- sharing social media posts from HSC NI Foster Care on your personal profile or interacting with the content
- supporting the work of the Southern Area Foster Care Support Group



Get involved with our community

This opportunity is **open to the public** as well as approved foster carers, adoptive parents and staff within the Southern Trust area.

Champions may choose to arrange just one information event in their local area, and this will be gratefully appreciated by us. There is no obligation for Champion to commit full-time or long-term.

Reasonable expenses will be paid.

By getting involved and becoming a Foster Care Champion **you will be helping us** find safe and loving foster homes in your local area.

We have information, stories, resources and more to help equip you to be the best Champion you can be.





Huge thanks to our Autism Connect funders



LAYERED LIVES

WOMEN SUPPORTING WOMEN

Are you a neurodivergent woman aged 16–30?
Join Layered Lives – a safe, empowering space to explore
all things relationships, connect with peers & be heard.



Layered Lives is a unique, neurodivergent-friendly programme for young women aged 16–30 and will run across Newry, Mourne & Down and Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Council areas.

Join us to explore what makes **healthy and unhealthy relationships**, how to recognise **red flags**, establish **boundaries** and maintain **personal safety**.

We will be looking at all relationships from friends and family to romantic relationships.

As well as looking at self-esteem and building confidence, the programme will offer a safe, empowering space for young women to talk, connect and benefit from peer support. **Join us!**

Want to know more?



Contact Tracy on:

Call 028 308 35764 OR email at



tracy@bolstercommunity.org

LADIES, READY TO DO SOMETHING FOR YOU? SEE WHERE WE CAN TAKE YOU WITH THE BUILDING FUTURES PROGRAMME!

BOLSTER
COMMUNITY

BUILDING
FUTURES

START YOUR JOURNEY

Building Futures is a programme developed for women who are looking at a fresh start - maybe you've been busy raising a family or had caring duties, and now finally have a little time to do something for you. Think of it as your starting point to getting your mojo back and putting yourself first - best of all, you don't have to figure out 'what next' on your own, we're here to help.

WHAT'S ON OFFER?

The Building Futures team in Newry, Mourne & Down and Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon have a range of programme options. You might want to start with our 'Discovering Potential' Resilience & Wellness programme. The perfect place to start if you are feeling a little unsure of what you could do - and will give you the tools, resources and insights you need to develop better self confidence, self-esteem and resilience, all in a welcoming and supportive environment.

ELIGIBILITY

- To be eligible you must be 18yrs old or older.
- Currently unemployed (i.e. have not worked in the last 4 weeks and not available to work in the next two weeks); and not on benefits with a Work Search element.
- Reside in Newry, Mourne & Down or Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon.

We also welcome applicants from priority groups such as the over 50s, those with a long term disability or those living in remote, rural communities.

GET IN TOUCH!

For more information or to register for the Building Futures programme, please contact Justina or Patricia on:

📞 028 3083 5764

✉ Justina@bolstercommunity.org or
patricia.murnion@womenstec.org

IT COULDN'T BE EASIER

- Weekly sessions in your local area across Newry, Mourne & Down and Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon.
- No cost to you.
- Come away with new found confidence and plan for the future.
- Enjoy new social connections!

Pictured below, our recent Classroom Assistant grads from Warrenpoint!



STARTING SEPT 2025

1. 'Discovering Potential' - a 6 week Self-Development & Wellness programme
WHERE: Rathfriland (class location tbc)
2. 'Classroom Assistant' - our bespoke course designed to make you classroom ready!
WHERE: Rathfriland/Banbridge (class location tbc)
AND Armagh (class location tbc)
3. 'Intro to DIY' with WOMENSTEC - learn how to do all the basic jobs around the home, from using drills and saws to hanging pictures and shelves.
WHERE: Rathfriland (Chandler's House, Oct '25)
4. Hybrid working/employability programme - embrace new employability skills, gain an understanding of hybrid working, develop stronger CV & interview skills, self-belief, confidence, and gain access to recruiting employers. (Location tbc)
5. Once engaged in the programme, you'll be able to avail of a training bursary (restrictions apply)

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W Women in
Business

Bolster Community, WOMEN'S TEC,
and Women In Business are
Building Futures partners in NM&D & ABC



"AN DROICHEAD" - THE BRIDGE POSITIVE TRANSITIONS PROGRAMME

BOLSTER
COMMUNITY

Join "An Droichead" This September!!

We're incredibly proud to launch An Droichead (The Bridge) - our full-time Post-16 programme designed for young people with special educational needs (SEN). Developed in partnership with St Paul's Bessbrook and fully funded by the Department for the Economy NI, this exciting new pathway is already making a powerful impact.

An Droichead offers something truly different - a five-day-a-week experience that blends learning, community involvement and real-world work placements, giving young people the tools they need to move forward with confidence.

A New "Bridge" to Brighter Futures

This programme is about much more than qualifications. It's about belonging, potential, and the belief that every young person deserves a chance to thrive. As one team member put it, "An Droichead is everything Bolster stands for - inclusion, empowerment, and helping young people get ahead in life. We're not just opening doors; we're walking alongside these young people as they step into their future."

From the very first team-building session, we've seen a sense of connection grow, and it's clear this is just the beginning of something really special.

Let's build bridges - together!

If you know a young person 16+ who would benefit from a programme that sees and supports their unique strengths, now's the time to act as spaces for September are limited. Call Orla on 028 3083 5764 or email orla@bolstercommunity.org to find out more.

An Droichead is funded by



Department for the
Economy
www.economy-ni.gov.uk

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Apprenticeships



Volunteer, Siún McCarthy, shortlisted for "Third Sector Learner of the Year" Award.

We are absolutely delighted to congratulate our wonderful volunteer, Siún McCarthy, on being shortlisted for the prestigious Third Sector Learner of the Year Award at the OCN Learning Endeavour Awards. Siún always brings heart and soul to everything she does at our Social Kitchen, where her warmth, kindness, and bubbly personality make a real difference. While volunteering with us, Siún has also been dedicated to her studies—a true testament to her commitment to learning and helping others. Joanne from the team shared, "Siún is a ray of sunshine—she never hesitates to step in and support wherever she's needed. We are so proud of her well-deserved nomination and will be crossing our fingers for her on the 24th of June! Well done Siún!!"



ACORN

SCENTS OF ACHIEVEMENT

New from Acorn

Our small but mighty Social Enterprise team have been hard at work developing our Acorn range - and are proud to share our newly extended 'Scents of Home' range now includes... drumroll please....

- Reed diffusers
- 3-Wick Candles
- NEW Wax melts (in a tin)
- And the OG tin candles.

Why not put a little order in today, treat yourself or someone else... end of year teacher gifts anyone?!

Your Acorn purchase helps keep our social enterprise viable, which in turn enables us to keep offering work opportunities to our young people of mixed ability like Steven, so thank you for your support!!



"I make candles and I sell candles to all of the customers and I'm best friends with people. When somebody's upset I help them, I'm very good with staff and people. I help with cleaning candles and the tins and be the best Bolster Buddy I can be."
[Steven, Bolster Buddy, 27yrs old]



ORDER ONLINE OR INSTORE

Contact us at: acorn@bolstercommunity.org
Order online at: www.acornshop.co.uk
Follow us on instagram @acornpcandle
We can also fulfill corporate orders with gift bags and gift box options for all budgets!

A Social Enterprise from

BOLSTER
COMMUNITY

Programmes & Services

for further detail on anything listed below, please contact us on 028 3083 5764



STAR BITES 57

STAR BITES 57 or Bolster Community's 'Social Kitchen' is a safe, warm space where registered service users & Housing Executive Tenants can avail of a light bite and social connection, while receiving practical and emotional support.

Start date: Ongoing. (every Tues + Thurs)
Time: 10AM TO 1PM
Location: Marcus Street

Registrations required, please contact Joanne at Bolster.

CLOVER CLUB

Clover Club aims to build social connection and emotional support for and between seniors in the Newry and Mourne Area. From a light bite, to sewing and dancing! It is a proud and essential part of our Senior services that offers practical support and a sense of fun later in life.

Clover Club runs once a fortnight in the Meadow & Armagh Rd Community Centre.

Registrations required. Please contact Paula at Bolster for details

"AN DROICHEAD"

An Droichead (The Bridge) - our full-time Post-16 programme designed for young people with additional needs. Developed in partnership with St Paul's Bessbrook and fully funded by the Department for the Economy N.I. - this is a five-day-a-week experience that blends learning, community involvement and real-world work placements, giving young people the tools they need to move forward with confidence.

Contact Orla at Bolster for further details

TOTS & TEA

Tots and Tea is a friendly group of parents/carers and children who are all on the first steps of their journey through disability and we have meet-ups every week.

Contact Julie-Anne at Bolster for further details



BOLSTER COMMUNITY

BUILDING FUTURES

Building Futures is open to women ages 18+ residing in the NMD and ABC areas and not currently working. Especially suited for those seeking a new path and eventually want to re-enter employment. We have many courses available in different locations. Please see Building Futures page enclosed for more detail and please contact Tracy or Justina by phone, or email trainingsupport@bolstercommunity.org

This Sept/Oct we have courses starting in Rathfriland, Banbridge and Armagh - see enclosed flyer for further detail.

LAYERED LIVES

Layered Lives is a unique, neurodivergent-friendly programme for young women aged 16-30 and will run across the NMD and ABC Council areas. As well as looking at self-esteem and building confidence, the programme will offer a safe, empowering space for young women to talk, connect and benefit from peer support. We will bring together age appropriate groups, so join us to connect with your peers.

See enclosed flyer for further details and contact Tracy to enquire further



PARENTS PLUS ADHD

An 8-wk evidence-based course for parents of children with ADHD beginning this January. Parenting is far from easy, having many ups and downs, and posing great challenges and demands. This course delves into how to tackle these challenges.

Now recruiting for Newry & Armagh PP ADHD courses - contact Gemma for further info

Newry starts 2nd Oct 25
Armagh starts 22nd Jan 26

PARENTS PLUS CHILDREN

Parenting children is far from easy, posing great challenges and demands. This 9-week evidence-based parenting course aims to support parents in their valuable role, in particular empowering them to find their own solutions to childhood challenges & problems. The course will help them promote confidence, learning and positive behaviour in children aged 6 to 11 years.

Now recruiting for our next online course starting Sept 25 - please contact Gemma for further info

FRIENDS Programmes

The FRIENDS Resilience Programme suite is a powerful evidence-based tool that supports the development of resilience and assists young people in the development of lifeskills. It is recognised by the WHO as best practice for the early intervention, detection and treatment of anxiety and depression; inspiring Confidence & Emotional strength

For enquiries on our next programmes:
Fun Friends (4-7yr olds) and
Friends for Life (9-11yr olds)
contact Justina

AUTISM CONNECT

Autism Connect is for adults (18+) either with or awaiting an autism-only diagnosis (i.e. not supported elsewhere) and living in the Southern Trust. This is a place of community, connection and support!

For further info on our Newry, Banbridge & Craigavon groups contact Sharon at Bolster

