

VOLUME 17: MARCH 2025

# BOLSTER COMMUNITY

## Newsletter



### Bolster Community Welcomes Bank of England to The Meadow



On Friday, February 21st, Bolster Community had the wonderful opportunity to welcome Dr. Swati Dhingra, External Member of the Monetary Policy Committee at the Bank of England, and Associate Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics, to The Meadow in Newry. Alongside Dr. Dhingra were Frances Hill and Gillian Anderson, Bank of England agents for Northern Ireland. This gathering brought together local charity partners, stakeholders, and community members for an important conversation about the real-life impact of global economic decisions, particularly around the rising cost of living in Newry.

The session offered a unique chance to hear directly from those most affected by economic changes - our local service users and charity leaders. Dr. Dhingra and her team listened with great care as they gained valuable insight into how national economic policies translate into everyday challenges in our communities. Together, we discussed the importance of early intervention and the power of collaboration in creating meaningful support. These conversations were a powerful reminder that, while economic decisions shape our lives, it's the people at the heart of our communities who must always be at the forefront of our thinking.

Local charity leaders shared their struggles in managing rising costs, including mandatory uplifts in Employers National Insurance and the minimum wage increases, all without an increase in funding contracts. Many spoke of the difficulties in retaining dedicated staff, especially as statutory services shrink and the third sector steps in to fill the gaps. Service users, too, shared their experiences of being supported and connected within the third sector in Newry and Mourne. While many expressed gratitude for the services available, there were concerns about whether these services could be sustained if funding pressures continue to impact staff retention. Jacinta Linden, our CEO, shared her thoughts on the day: "Today's visit reminds us all of the importance of listening and engaging with those who are most vulnerable. The rising costs of living are impacting so many, and we must stay focused on advocating for those who need us most. With growing levels of child and elder poverty, the need for action has never been more urgent. But I believe, together, we can make a difference."

This conversation doesn't end here. We invite you to join us at Bolster Community's 20th Anniversary Conference, Everyday Heroes - Celebrating Extraordinary Impact, on March 27th at the Canal Court Hotel. Let's continue to explore how we can all play a part in building a stronger, more resilient future for everyone in our communities. We'd love for you to be a part of this exciting event! Tickets are available now on Eventbrite - just scan the QR code for further info.



## EVERYDAY HEROES

Celebrating Extraordinary Impact



Join Bolster Community for a bold & inspiring conference celebrating the life-changing impact of early intervention.

Explore how support at point of need can transform lives and strengthen communities, with expert panellists and keynote speaker, Dr. Katriona O'Sullivan.

Join us on 27th March 2025  
Canal Court Hotel, 9am-2pm  
For further info & to reserve your place  
Scan the QR code above.

**BOLSTER  
COMMUNITY**  
Still going strong, 20 years on



# Tackling Loneliness, Together



Did you know that Ireland is statistically the loneliest place in Europe? While the COVID-19 pandemic certainly contributed to feelings of isolation, the issue of loneliness has been around long before. Many people in our communities continue to experience loneliness, and it's important to recognise that it affects not only the elderly but also young people and families. In fact, recent stats show that the middle-aged experience higher levels of loneliness than any other group! At Bolster Community, we're committed to providing support that helps people feel connected and supported. Loneliness can take a toll on anyone's mental and physical health, and we believe that no one should have to face it alone.



As part of our ongoing efforts to combat loneliness, we actively engage with the TILT initiative, which aims to address social isolation in our communities. TILT (Tackling Isolation and Loneliness Together) focuses on building relationships and creating opportunities for individuals to connect with others. Through this initiative, we are reaching out to those who are most at risk of isolation, providing them with the support they need to build stronger connections with others.

Bolster Community's work spans across three key areas: Family, Ability, and Seniors. In each of these areas, we focus on building a sense of community and support for those who might otherwise feel isolated. Combating loneliness is not a job for one organisation alone. It's a collective effort that requires all of us to come together. At Bolster Community, we are proud to be a part of the solution, helping people from all walks of life feel connected, supported, and valued. Whether it's through our family services, ability services, or programmes for seniors, our mission remains clear: we're here to help people get through tough times and get ahead in life. If you or someone you know is struggling with loneliness, we encourage you to check out some of our programmes, or to be signposted to another organisation that can help. We're always here with a helping hand and a welcoming heart. You are not alone.

## FAMILY

### The Heart of Our Community: Family Support in Combating Loneliness



"1 in 5 families report experiencing some form of loneliness"

Newsletter funded by:



Southern Health  
and Social Care Trust

Family support plays a crucial role in combating loneliness, particularly for those who face challenges such as financial hardship, mental health struggles, and isolation. In Ireland, over 1 in 5 families report experiencing some form of loneliness, and the need for family-focused support has never been more critical. Providing practical assistance and emotional support can make a world of difference in helping families feel connected, supported, and less isolated. The Family Support Hub at Bolster Community is here to help families navigate these difficult times, offering tailored support to strengthen family bonds and reduce feelings of isolation. Through a collaborative approach, we work with parents, caregivers, and children to create a positive impact on their overall well-being and sense of connection within the community. As one mum said, "I don't know where my children and I would be without Bolster's help."

To those who want to contact our Family Support Hub, you can make a self-referral or a referral can be made by anyone working on your behalf, such as a teacher, doctor, health visitor, or community group. Just pick up the phone and call Caroline on 028 3083 5764 to find out more. We're here to help!



Call Caroline on 028 3083 5764 for more information  
or to avail of our Family Support Hub.



## SENIORS

# Our "Discover & Connect" Event

What an incredible afternoon we had at our Discover & Connect event! This event was a true celebration of community, connection, and well-being, as local seniors gathered to not only learn about vital services but also to connect with each other in meaningful ways. In a world where loneliness is an ever-present challenge, events like these serve as a reminder of the strength and importance of coming together as a community.

One of the most touching moments came when an attendee recognised an old school friend she hadn't seen in 40 years - a powerful reminder of the lasting bonds we share. And it wasn't just the ladies who joined in; it was fantastic to see many gents at the event as well, proving that these gatherings are for everyone. From engaging with local services to enjoying lunch and dancing to the tunes of Billy Finnegan, the afternoon was packed with laughter and joy!!

For many of our attendees, this event was more than just a fun day out—it was a chance to combat the loneliness that many face, especially as they age. One participant shared: "An absolutely fantastic day out! I loved learning about the services for people my age (over 60's) and then having lunch before dancing to Billy Finnegan. It made me feel 18 again, dancing to those tunes!"

Events like Discover & Connect are more than just a chance to find out about services; they are an opportunity to build new friendships, rekindle old ones, and, most importantly, remind people that they are not alone. The sense of community was palpable as attendees interacted with one another and enjoyed the day's activities. By bringing people together and showing them the support available, we help combat loneliness and isolation, offering a brighter, more connected future for everyone involved.



"An absolutely fantastic day out! I loved learning about the services for people my age (over 60's) and then having lunch before dancing to Billy Finnegan. It made me feel 18 again, dancing to those tunes!"



## ABILITY



# The Jumping Jellybeans After School Club

We're thrilled to introduce a brand-new after-school group for children with disabilities and their siblings! The Jumping Jellybeans. Our goal is to provide a fun, supportive, and safe space where kids can learn, play, and connect after school. From arts and crafts to sensory play, sports, and more, we offer a variety of engaging activities in a safe environment led by experienced staff. Children will also enjoy a light snack upon arrival, homework support, and a nutritious meal before heading home. This programme is open to children aged 5 to 11 years with disabilities and their siblings, offering a structured and enjoyable after-school experience during term-time only. Please note, spaces are limited, and we encourage early registration on the evening of Thursday the 27th March, 4-6pm, Whitegates Office. Unfortunately we cannot support the needs of children who require personal care or 1:1 support. To learn more or to secure a spot, please reach out to Jena at [jena@bolstercommunity.org](mailto:jena@bolstercommunity.org). We can't wait to welcome your family into this exciting new adventure!



We are excited to introduce our new after-school group, the Jumping Jellybeans Club! Designed for children with disabilities and their siblings. Our goal is to provide a safe, engaging & structured environment where children can learn, play & socialise.

### The JJ Club offers:

- Snack & Social Time
- Homework Club
- Engaging Activities - Fun and inclusive activities, including arts & crafts, music, sensory play, sports, and more!
- Nutritious Meal - A healthy, home-style meal before heading home.
- A Safe & Supportive Environment with experienced staff.

### Where & When?

Time: 3-hour session after school  
Location: TBC Term Time Only - This group runs during school terms. Summer activities TBC

Spaces are limited! To register or learn more, please contact Jena via Email: [jena@bolstercommunity.org](mailto:jena@bolstercommunity.org)

Funded by

 Southern Health and Social Care Trust





# Autism Awareness Month : How will YOU be celebrating?



This April marks World Autism Awareness Month, an important time to raise awareness, promote acceptance, and create a more inclusive society for those with autism. At Bolster Community, we believe in the power of understanding, connection, and support. This month is not just about awareness, but about taking meaningful action to ensure that autistic people are empowered, supported, and celebrated for who they are.

Those with autism bring unique strengths, perspectives, and talents to our communities, and it's essential that we all play a role in fostering a society that truly embraces and appreciates these differences. Whether you're a family member, colleague, or friend, your involvement can help create a world where everyone is valued and empowered. Here's how you can get involved with Bolster Community this April:

- **Share Your Story:** If you have a personal experience with autism—whether as an individual, a family member, or a community supporter—share your story with us. Your experiences can inspire others and help raise awareness.
- **Wear Purple & Pink:** On April 2nd, show your support by wearing purple and pink in recognition of World Autism Awareness Day & to support Bolster. Let's create a visual sea of support!
- **Take a Selfie:** Snap a selfie in your purple & pink gear and share it on social media to show your support! Don't forget to use the hashtags **#bolsteringautismawareness** and **#bolstercommunity** to help spread the message of acceptance and inclusion, and to maybe even be featured on our socials!

At Bolster Community, we're committed to creating a world where everyone is understood, empowered, and celebrated, including those with autism. Your support in April can help foster a more accepting world for people with autism and their families. Let's work together to spread awareness, acceptance, and love. We can all help create a community that celebrates diversity and empowers everyone to thrive.

To stay involved in our Ability services, including those focused on autism, please follow us on socials or contact the email below for more information.



Are you an adult with an autism-only diagnosis living in the Southern Trust Region? Contact us by email at:



[autismconnect@bolstercommunity.org](mailto:autismconnect@bolstercommunity.org) to find out more about our autism services and get involved.

Funded by:



Southern Health and Social Care Trust



## "Friday Chats" For Adults With Autism

Join us for Friday Chats at Bolster Community, a supportive space for adults with autism in their late 20s or over 30s to connect, share experiences, and discuss the challenges of everyday life. Along with peer support, we also offer mentoring to assist with things like filling out forms or connecting you with relevant services.

We warmly invite you to join us at Bolster Community, 5-7 Marcus Street, Newry. For more information, please contact Sharon at 028 30835764, or email [autismconnect@bolstercommunity.org](mailto:autismconnect@bolstercommunity.org). We look forward to welcoming you!

## TILT

Tackling Isolation and Loneliness Together

An initiative with a range of targeted supports for groups, organisations and individuals

TILT landing page coming soon

This webpage will include resources and support to help you tackle loneliness

For more information contact Barry Traynor - [barry.traynor@southerntrust.hscni.net](mailto:barry.traynor@southerntrust.hscni.net)

Connecting

Learning yourself well

ME

Existing Networks & Supports





## Our Spring Candles: A Story of Connection

As the season of renewal arrives, we're excited to share our fresh collection of Spring candles, hand-poured with love and care by the Bolster Buddies, the dedicated candlemakers at the heart of our business.

Each candle tells a story, and when you purchase one of our glass candle jars, you'll also receive a personally signed note from the maker with a code that you can enter on our website to unlock more about the creators.

With every flicker of these Spring candles, you'll feel the warmth of connection and the creativity of the Bolster Buddies.

Creating **SOCIAL VALUE** with every purchase



At ACORN, our mission goes beyond creating beautiful candles; we're committed to building connections and combating loneliness through our social enterprise. By supporting our work, you're not only bringing light into your home but also helping us foster a community where every individual feels seen and valued. Join us this Spring in celebrating the spirit of connection, and let the stories behind each candle inspire you to spread warmth, kindness, and understanding. Together, we can make a difference, one candle at a time.



## ORDER ONLINE

Contact us at: [acorn@bolstercommunity.org](mailto:acorn@bolstercommunity.org)

Order online at: [www.acornshop.co.uk](http://www.acornshop.co.uk)

Follow us on instagram @acorncandle

We can also fulfil corporate orders with gift bags and gift box options for all budgets!

A Bolster Community  
Social Enterprise

**BOLSTER**  
COMMUNITY

# What's going on in April 2025?

## BOLSTER COMMUNITY

### FUN FRIENDS

4-7 years old

Fun FRIENDS guides the social and emotional development of children using fun, play-based group activities. It nurtures the child's development by teaching how to engage resilience skills early on.

Start date: TBC  
Time: 3.30pm  
Location: Newry  
Duration 10 weeks

### FRIENDS FOR LIFE

8-11 years old

Friends for Life builds resilience, social and emotional skills in children. It is proven to reduce anxiety, as well as equip participants with the tools to rise to life's challenges.

Start date: TBC  
Time: 3.30pm- 5pm  
Location: Newry  
Duration 10 weeks

### PARENTS PLUS ADHD

An 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.

Start date: April 2025  
Time: 10.30am  
Location: Portadown

### PARENTS PLUS CHILDREN

With our Parents Plus Children Programme parents can get support to manage the challenges of raising children, especially through adolescence, and improve their family's well-being and strengthen their links with other parents. This course is for all parents seeking to learn more about raising children.

Dates: SEPTEMBER 2025 Newry  
Time: 10.30am  
Location: Different locations

### STAR BITES CAFE RETURNS

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. Tues +Thurs  
Time: 10AM TO 1PM  
Location: Marcus Street  
Tuesdays & Thursdays every week.

### BUILDING FUTURES

Building Futures is open to women ages 18+ residing in the Newry and Mourne Area. Especially suited for those seeking employment or in search of something new. We have many courses available in different locations. To find out more, please contact Tracy or Justina by phone, or email [trainingsupport@bolstercommunity.org](mailto:trainingsupport@bolstercommunity.org)

Dates: Course dependent  
Time: Course dependent  
Location: Course Dependent

### HOME 2 HOSPITAL

A volunteer driver service supporting seniors (60+) living in Slieve Gullion or the Mournes to access out-of-area hospital appointments. Please ring Paula at our Whitegates office on [028 3083 5764](tel:02830835764) to find out more.

Start date: Ongoing  
Time: Office Hours 9-5pm  
Location: Newry

### CLOVER CLUB

Clover Club aims to build social connection and emotional support for and between older women 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.

Start date: Ongoing  
Time: 10am-1pm  
Location: Newry  
Duration 6 weeks

### 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 for further info at [028 3083 5764](tel:02830835764)

### INTERESTED IN REGISTERING FOR AN UPCOMING PROGRAMME?

Contact: Justina MacDonald  
on [028 3083 5764](tel:02830835764) or  
[trainingsupport@bolstercommunity.org](mailto:trainingsupport@bolstercommunity.org)

