

VOLUME 19: OCTOBER 2025

# BOLSTER COMMUNITY *Newsletter*



## Holding Space This Autumn: Bolster's

### Trauma-Informed Course for Autistic Adults

Vivian McKinnon knows what it's like when thoughts won't slow down. As a trauma-informed practitioner with lived experience, Vivian will bring much more than just professional knowledge to Bolster's latest 'Autism & Me' course.

Her approach is shaped by personal understanding of the emotional toll that comes with navigating everyday interactions as an autistic adult. Having faced similar challenges herself, Vivian has developed a range of practical techniques to help quiet negative self-talk and manage moments of overwhelm.

This Newsletter is funded by:



Southern Health  
and Social Care Trust



Vivian will facilitate Bolster's latest 'Autism & Me' course starting Tues 14<sup>th</sup> October (6.30pm-8.30pm) at Elim Church, Banbridge. Offered through Bolster Community's Autism & Me programme, the course explores one theme that resonates time and again: overthinking. The constant inner dialogue many autistic adults experience isn't just exhausting – it can be isolating, leaving people stuck in loops of second-guessing and self-criticism.

Sharon Donnelly, Autism Connect project lead at Bolster Community explains, "We have seen a great unmet need in our community amongst autistic adults. We have also met people who have been recently diagnosed and now have many questions around their life experiences to date. We want to encourage those people to come forward and take part, as well as individuals who may have been diagnosed for some time. We think this will be hugely beneficial for those interested in exploring their feelings, building coping strategies, and connecting with others."

Sharon explains, "Vivian has a real understanding of the weight of both personal and societal narratives that can hold people back. These sessions will give autistic adults the chance to listen, learn, and take away strategies that feel right for them. We would love to encourage anyone who would find this helpful in their day to day lives to please reach out asap."

If you or someone you know is an autistic adult (diagnosed or awaiting diagnosis, 18+, and living in the Southern Trust area), this course could be a meaningful step toward connection and self-understanding.

#### Where & When?

📍 Elim Church, Victoria Street, Banbridge

🕒 Tuesdays | 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM

📅 14th October - 18th November 2025.

Open to both members and non-members of Autism Connect. Places are limited and registration essential.

#### TO REGISTER:

Email [autismconnect@bolstercommunity.org](mailto:autismconnect@bolstercommunity.org)  
or call 028 3083 5764 and ask for Sharon.

**BOLSTER COMMUNITY**

# NEON NIGHTMARE

An inclusive night out!  
in support of Bolster Community

Kindly sponsored by  
Henry, Abime & Down  
PSP

Over 18's  
£10 Entry

FANCY DRESS  
OPTIONAL

WHERE: Canal Court (Clanrye Suite)  
WHEN: Wed. 29th October '25  
TIME: 7.30pm to 10pm finish  
COST: £10 entry per person

LIMITED CAPACITY - GET ON THE GUESTLIST\*  
£10 ENTRY PAYABLE IN ADVANCE AT:  
BOLSTER COMMUNITY WHITEGATES OR VIA PAYPAL AT  
<https://bit.ly/neon-nightmare-paypal>

\*All abilities welcome but must have chaperone if 1-1 support required.  
Bolster Community is not responsible for any individual attending unaccompanied, and ID will be required to buy alcoholic drinks.

SCAN ME

# Q&A with Michelle Lundy - Family Support Practitioner at Bolster

**Q: Hi Michelle! Can you tell us a bit about your role at Bolster Community?**

**A:** Of course! I'm a Family Support Practitioner, which means I work directly with families who are going through challenging times. My role is all about providing practical and emotional support to help them feel more confident and equipped to manage day-to-day life.

**Q: How do families access Family Support through Bolster Community?**

**A:** It's really straightforward. Families can self-refer, or someone like a teacher, GP, or health visitor can refer on their behalf. We are the lead body of the Newry & Mourne Family Support Hub, and as well as managing monthly referrals with our hub partners, we then also accept many referrals where 1-1 Family Support is identified as the most appropriate response.

**Q: What kinds of challenges do families usually face when they come to you?**

**A:** There's no one-size-fits-all. Some families need support with parenting strategies, like managing behaviours or setting routines. Others might be dealing with more emotional issues such as bereavement, illness, or relationship breakdowns. Whatever the reason, we're here to help without judgement.

**Q: What does a typical day look like for you?**

**A:** A lot of my time is spent reviewing new referrals and making those first calls to introduce myself. I'll then arrange initial meetings with families. After that, we begin weekly support visits, which usually last about 1.5 to 2 hours.

**Q: How long do you work with a family?**

**A:** We usually support families over a period of around 8 to 10 weeks. During that time, we work together on goals that are important to them—whether that's improving communication, building routines, or simply feeling more in control at home.

**Q: What would you say to someone who's unsure about asking for support?**

**A:** I'd say—don't wait. Everyone needs a bit of help sometimes, and that's okay. Our service is friendly, confidential, and designed to empower families, not judge them. If you're feeling overwhelmed, we're here to walk beside you.

To enquire about a referral to the N&M Family Support Hub please contact Bolster Community on 028 3083 5764.



## LAYERED LIVES WOMEN SUPPORTING WOMEN

Are you a neurodivergent woman aged 16–30?

Join us for the 'Layered Lives' programme – a safe, empowering space to explore all things relationships – connect with others, gain valuable tools and find community.



OUR NEXT LAYERED LIVES PROGRAMME WILL  
START MON 20<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER  
DOBBIN ST COMMUNITY CENTRE, ARMAGH.  
6–8PM FOR 6 WEEKS

Join us to explore what makes **healthy** and **unhealthy** relationships, learn how to recognise **red flags**, establish and manage **boundaries** and maintain **personal safety** both on and off line.

We'll look at **all kinds of relationships** from friends & family to romantic relationships.

Join the Layered Lives Programme  
everyone deserves to feel safe and empowered!

To enquire please contact Tracy or Sharon at Bolster Community on 028 3083 35764

OR email us at [info@bolstercommunity.org](mailto:info@bolstercommunity.org)

## Layered Lives comes to Dobbin Street Community Centre Armagh this October!

Layered Lives, is a programme offering neurodiverse young women a safe, empowering space to explore all things relationships. This programme is currently rolling out across Newry & Mourne and ABC Council areas and we would love to encourage any young women who identifies as neurodiverse to join us to discuss important topics around healthy relationships, setting boundaries and personal safety both on and offline.

Our next course begins w/c 20th October at Dobbin Street Community Centre. Over six (in person) sessions, Layered Lives participants will come together to explore many relationship topics including:

- Identifying healthy and unhealthy relationship patterns
- Recognising red flags and signs of manipulation or control
- Building and asserting personal boundaries
- Staying safe in online and offline environments (including a digital safety workshop with leading experts)
- Reflecting on lived experiences and connecting with others in a judgment-free space.

Programme facilitator Tracy McCartney from Bolster Community has delivered the Layered Lives pilot course in Newry and recognises the unique challenges neurodiverse women often face in forming and maintaining safe, healthy relationships, sharing, "We know this programme has the potential to help so many young women and we would love to encourage anyone interested in joining our programme to reach out." See details in poster (left).



SENIORS

## HOME 2 HOSPITAL



- Are you over 60 and live in the Slieve Gullion or Kilkeel (and surrounding) areas?
- Are there times when you struggle to get to your hospital appointments?

- If the answer is 'Yes' then please contact Bolster Community, and register for the free 'Home2Hospital' driver service in this area.
- One of our volunteer drivers will pick you up at home, accompany you to your appointment, and leave you home again - ensuring you arrive safely and on time, without the stress.
- All our drivers are 'Access NI' approved and will take the main passenger (and accompanying carer if required).
- Please note, this service only covers transport to 'out of area' appointments.

To register, contact Paula on 028 3083 5764

**BOLSTER**  
COMMUNITY

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

Comhairle Ceantair  
an Iúir, Mhúrn  
agus an Dúin  
Newry, Mourne  
and Down  
District Council

## Home-2-Hospital: Supporting Seniors

For those aged 60+ needing help to attend out-of-area hospital appointments—whether to Belfast, Craigavon or Dungannon—Bolster's Home 2 Hospital service offers more than transport. It provides peace of mind, safety, and compassionate support at a time it's needed most. If you are interested in registering for this service, please don't hesitate to call us on 028 3083 5764 and talk to our Home 2 Hospital co-ordinator Paula.



We recently launched a campaign to find more volunteer drivers in the Slieve Gullion area (and to also let more seniors know about the service too). Step forward Cullyhanna senior, Mary Theresa Garvey who kindly visited Bolster Community to share why the service has been a life line to her. Theresa's video clip has now been viewed nearly 50,000 times on our Facebook and insta channels!!! :)

### Bolster Launches new research project!

Are you over 60 and living in Newry, Mourne & Down? Tell us what would help you live well as you get older! Take the Not Done Yet Survey at:

<https://bit.ly/not-done-yet-survey>

NOT

DONE

YET

**BOLSTER**  
COMMUNITY

See more on the Seniors  
Survey on page 6!

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

Promoting  
Wellbeing  
DIVISION

## SHSCT Carers Coordinators

Recognising, Valuing and Linking  
Unpaid Carers to Support

#teamSHSCT



[www.southerntrust.hscni.net](http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net)

Scan the QR-code to visit our  
Carers Support Webpage



Image L16, NOV 2018/BSA





## Passing The Baton Of Hope

It was our honour to be apart of The Baton of Hope Tour 25. Our amazing Bolster Buddies and Baton bearer Sarah walked proudly with PIPS Hope and Support, spreading smiles and the powerful message that no one is ever alone. As Seamus McCabe, founder of PIPS Hope and Support reminded us all, "the true baton is the one we carry in our hearts and minds. It is a promise to keep hope alive and support one another moving forward."

Later in Newry, at the Baton of Hope Community Market, our Autism Connect member and group mentor Sean met with Chief Medical Officer Dr Michael McBride, showing just how strong and inspiring our community can be. The baton of hope continues to be carried in our hearts. As a reminder to support one another and as a tribute to those we have lost to suicide, this baton was and is a call to keep hope alive for others. Its message lives on in every act of kindness and connection.

A heartfelt thank you to Seamus, Padraig, and all the organisers for the privilege of being part of such a powerful initiative. We will remember this day for a long time to come. The seed of hope has been planted...

Photo credit: Liz Boyle, Newry Reporter.



Chief Medical Officer Dr Michael McBride with member and mentor Sean from Autism Connect.

## Support for Small Charities

Are you part of a small charity in the Newry and Mourne area? CO3 and the Halifax Foundation are marking their 40th anniversaries with a free half-day Financial Resilience Workshop to support small, rural charities. It takes place on Monday 10th November in Newry and offers practical tools to help strengthen your organisation's financial sustainability. Applications are now open - don't miss out! For full details on locations, dates, and how to apply, visit the CO3 website: [www.co3.org.uk](http://www.co3.org.uk)



## Bolster Community Shortlisted for THREE Social Enterprise Awards



2024 Consumer Facing Winners. CEO Jacinta Linden featured with Newry Mayor Pete Byrne and Bolster Staff.

We're absolutely delighted to share some exciting news. Bolster Community has been shortlisted in three categories at this year's Social Enterprise Awards:

- Young Person of the Year
- Social Enterprise Building Diversity
- Product-Based Social Enterprise Award

This recognition is a powerful endorsement of the work we do everyday to create opportunities, champion belonging, and make a real difference in people's lives. It celebrates the passion, resilience, and impact of our team, our young people, and our wider community. The winners will be announced at the awards ceremony on 7th November, and we couldn't be prouder to be recognised alongside so many inspiring organisations. Fingers crossed for Team Bolster!

Northern Ireland  
**SOCIAL ENTERPRISE  
AWARDS  
2025**

#SocEntNIAwards25

**FINALIST**





We are delighted to share that Bolster Community was Highly Commended in the Best Charity category at the recent Greater Newry Business Awards, hosted by Newry Chamber. Representatives from our team, volunteers, peer mentors, and Social Kitchen staff were proud to attend this prestigious event, which celebrated the outstanding contributions of local organisations. We extend our heartfelt congratulations to all the inspiring charities and businesses recognised on the night – with a special mention to the incredible team at Women's Aid Armagh Down.



At the recent Greater Newry Business Awards, Bolster Community was Highly Commended in the Best Charity category and our CEO & Founder Jacinta Linden was recognised for Outstanding Contribution to the Greater Newry Area!!





# Bolster Buddies September Residential at East Coast Adventure Centre



Despite a soggy start, this year's Bolster Buddies residential was a huge success, filled with adventure, fun, and unforgettable memories! A big thank you to East Coast Adventure Centre for an action-packed two days, our fantastic support staff for their dedication, and of course, the Buddies themselves for embracing every challenge with enthusiasm, courage, and plenty of craic! For any enquiries for the Bolster Buddies service, please contact Jena on 028 3083 5764.

## “Not Done Yet”: Seniors in Newry, Mourne & Down Lead the Way on Living Well

Older people across Newry, Mourne & Down are standing up to say they're “Not Done Yet” – and they want to shape a more age-friendly future for our community. We launched our new research project, ‘Not Done Yet’, at our Discover & Connect event for Seniors on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> Sept.

Assisted by a team of student volunteers from St Louis' Grammar School, over 100 seniors shared their thoughts about what would help them age well - and we would like to invite everyone over 60 throughout Newry, Mourne & Down to also take part in the survey! (link below)

The project will gather the views of residents aged 60+ to understand what helps them live well, what makes life harder, and what changes would make the biggest difference. The findings, to be published in March 2026, will directly inform Age NI, NMDC's Living Well strategy, and the wider Age Friendly agenda.

### Why this matters

- The number of people aged 65+ in Northern Ireland is projected to rise by 74% by 2043 (NISRA).
- In Newry, Mourne & Down, nearly 1 in 5 residents is already over 65 – one of the fastest-growing age groups.
- Research by Age NI shows that 1 in 3 older people often feel lonely, and over half worry about accessing hospital appointments and transport.

We already deliver innovative services like our Home 2 Hospital scheme, helping older people attend out-of-area medical appointments, and much-loved social clubs such as Clover Club and Starbites Social Kitchen, which bring older people together to combat isolation. But with demand rising, there is an urgent need to strengthen resourcing, widen supports, and invest in community-led solutions that help people stay healthy, connected, and independent. Over the next five months, the Not Done Yet survey and engagement activities will run at Discover & Connect events, GP surgeries, Men's Sheds, community groups/centres etc.

The survey can also be completed online at: <https://bit.ly/not-done-yet-survey> or paper copies of the survey can be requested from Bolster Community on 028 3083 5764. Please have your say! The final Not Done Yet report will be launched in March 2026, giving a powerful platform for older people's voices to influence policy and funding decisions, so watch this space!







# ACORN

SCENTS OF ACHIEVEMENT

## The Candle with a Heart: ACORN is the perfect gift this Autumn!

As the days grow shorter and the nights a little longer, there's no better time to bring a little warmth into your space. Through ACORN, we have been able to offer meaningful work, creativity and purpose to our team of young people of mixed abilities - otherwise fondly known as the Bolster Buddies.

When you light an ACORN candle, you're not just filling your home with scent, you're connecting to a real person's journey - from candle pouring to finishing touches, sales, deliveries, marketing and beyond - our Buddies will all have had a meaningful hand in the journey.

This autumn, let the glow of ACORN guide you through the season. Whether you're curling up with a book, setting the mood for dinner, or just seeking a moment of calm, why not choose an Acorn candle or diffuser and know you have helped support opportunity & inclusion right here at Bolster Community.

## Feel the Warmth. Light the Season.

### Let your season glow with meaning this autumn...

At ACORN, you are certainly spoilt for choice, there is a fragrance for everyone - so let us share a couple of our Buddies autumnal favourites.



Gabrielle recommends  
Gullion Breeze (candle tin)



Tara suggests  
Mourn Echoes (Wax Melts)



Steven's pick is the  
Carlingford Whispers diffuser



Above, Tara melts more wax for a new batch of candles and Shauna and Tara making new diffusers with Jena.



## ORDER ONLINE OR INSTORE

Order online at:

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

Contact us at:

[acorn@bolstercommunity.org](mailto:acorn@bolstercommunity.org)

Follow us on instagram @acorncandle and keep an eye out for our Xmas markets, corporate gifting also possible for all budgets.



A Social Enterprise from

**BOLSTER**  
COMMUNITY



BOLSTER COMMUNITY		Autumn Services & Programmes (2025)	
Family Support Hub Child/Parental groups/programmes:	Description	When & Where	
1-1 Family Support (early intervention)	We are the lead body for the Newry & Mourne Family Support Hub and a referral into the FSH is the first step in accessing early intervention 1-1 Family Support from Bolster Community (where identified as the most appropriate response). For further information and to download a referral form, please go to: <a href="https://bolstercommunity.org/services/family-support-hub/">https://bolstercommunity.org/services/family-support-hub/</a> or call us on 028 3083 5764.	Always on	
Tots & Tea	A weekly meet up of mums and children who are all on the first steps of their journey through disability. This group meets every Wed and registrations are required. Once a month we also host a mums meet up! For further information go to: <a href="https://bolstercommunity.org/services/tots-tea/">https://bolstercommunity.org/services/tots-tea/</a> or call Jena on 028 3083 5764.	Every Wed, Newry	
Fun FRIENDS (evidence-based programme)	This evidence-based WHO recognised programme helps promote positive social development in 4-7 year olds. After completing Fun FRIENDS, parents and teachers often see increased confidence, enhanced social skills and boosted self-esteem, as well as an increased ability to cope with stress and fear. Please contact us register your interest at <a href="mailto:info@bolstercommunity.org">info@bolstercommunity.org</a> or call us on 028 3083 5764.	Sept 25, Newry	
Parents Plus Children (evidence-based programme)	A 9-wk parenting course which aims to support parents with children 6-11yrs old, empowering them to find their solutions to childhood challenges & problems. Please contact us to register your interest at <a href="mailto:info@bolstercommunity.org">info@bolstercommunity.org</a> or call us on 028 3083 5764.	Sept 25, Online	
Parents Plus ADHD (evidence-based programme)	Designed for parents of children aged 6-12yrs with ADHD. This 8 week course emphasises positive communication & reinforcement, and provides strategies for managing behaviour. Please contact us to register your interest or call us on 028 3083 5764.	Oct 25, Newry Jan 26, Armagh	
Parents Plus Adolescents (evidence-based programme)	The Parents Plus Adolescents Programme aims to support parents in their valuable role of bringing up teenagers and helping them grow into confident, well-adjusted adults. Please contact us to register your interest at <a href="mailto:info@bolstercommunity.org">info@bolstercommunity.org</a>	Jan 26, Newry	
<i>Please note, some of the above programmes may be at capacity, but we encourage you to register your interest to be on a waitlist for future programmes when announced.</i>			
Empowering women and girls	Description	When & Where	
Layered Lives (Ending Violence Against Women & Girls Programme)	Layered Lives offers a safe, empowering space for neurodiverse young women (aged 16-30yrs) to explore all things relationships – this course is running in both Newry & Mourne and ABC Council areas starting Sept '25. For enquiries please contact email <a href="mailto:tracy@bolstercommunity.org">tracy@bolstercommunity.org</a> or call Tracy on 028 3083 5764.	Autumn 25, N&M and ABC Council areas	
Building Futures	This programme is tailored to helping women (who are currently unemployed), figure out a pathway back to work, whilst gaining renewed confidence and self-esteem. This term we have a number of courses & classes running – to learn more please email <a href="mailto:justina@bolstercommunity.org">justina@bolstercommunity.org</a> or call Justina on 028 3083 5764. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employability/Classroom Assistant, Rathfriland (Sept. '25)</li> <li>DIY with numeracy, Rathfriland (Oct. '25)</li> <li>Discovering Potential (Self-Development), Rathfriland (Sept. '25)</li> <li>Employability/Classroom Assistant, Armagh (Sept. '25)</li> <li>Supporting your child with homework, Newry &amp; Rathfriland (Oct. '25)</li> <li>Supporting your child with homework, Armagh (Nov. '25)</li> </ul>	Sept-Nov 25, Newry, Rathfriland Armagh	
Young adults of mixed ability	Description	When & Where	
Bolster Buddies	Our Buddies service is aimed at helping people with learning disabilities or support needs to reconnect with their local communities whilst promoting independence and improving life skills. This term we will also be delivering an OCN level 1 qualification in Community Independence. For enquiries please contact <a href="mailto:jena@bolstercommunity.org">jena@bolstercommunity.org</a> or call Jena on 028 3083 5764.	Newry, Contact us re availability	
An Droichead (The Bridge)	A brand new full-time transition programme which we are delivering in partnership with St. Paul's High School (Bessbrook), for young people (16+) with additional needs – helping them grow in confidence, gain real-world skills and explore what life after school can look like. Students will be based at Bolster Community Mon-Wed and at St. Paul's High School Thurs-Fri. For further information, please contact <a href="mailto:orla@bolstercommunity.org">orla@bolstercommunity.org</a> or call Orla on 028 3083 5764.	Newry, Contact us re availability	
Autism Connect	A Social Hub aimed at supporting adults (18 years +) with an autism and/or neurodiverse diagnosis but without a learning disability or mental health co-morbidity (i.e. not able to access support through other avenues), and living in the Southern Trust region. This group now meets in three locations each week – Newry, Banbridge and Craigavon. For enquiries please contact <a href="mailto:sharon@bolstercommunity.org">sharon@bolstercommunity.org</a> or call Sharon on 028 3083 5764.	Newry, Craigavon & Banbridge Contact us re availability	
Autism & Me	Autism & Me is a 6-week journey of self-discovery & emotional wellbeing. It's a safe, welcoming space to explore your thoughts, feelings, behaviours, & how you relate to yourself and others. Through learning, discussion, & hands-on activities, you'll gain practical tools to help you: Manage emotions, Improve Communication, Build routines that support your mental health, Understand yourself with more compassion and Create a personal plan for your future. This course will be facilitated by Trauma Informed Practitioner, Vivian McKinnon. For enquiries please contact <a href="mailto:sharon@bolstercommunity.org">sharon@bolstercommunity.org</a> or call Sharon on 028 3083 5764.	Elim Church, Banbridge Every Tues (6:30 – 8:30 PM) 14.10-18.11.25	
Seniors	Description	When & Where	
Clover Club	Clover Club is a fortnightly get together for over 60's from Newry and surrounding areas. Come and join us for weekly activities, such as arts & crafts, quizzes, workshops, talks and much more. Enjoy a catch up with friends old & new, and enjoy some light refreshments. To register, contact us at <a href="mailto:admin@bolstercommunity.org">admin@bolstercommunity.org</a> or call Paula on 028 3083 5764.	Newry, Every 2nd Wed	
Home 2 Hospital	This service is for the over 60's who live in the Slieve Gullion or Kilkeel (and surrounding) areas, who may struggle to get to their out of area hospital appointments (e.g. Belfast, Craigavon). Once registered, we will be able to match your next appointment with one of our volunteer drivers, talking the stress and hassle out of future appointments. For enquiries please contact us Paula on 028 3083 5764.	New service users welcome	
Social Kitchen 'Star bites 57'	New Tenants Welcome! The Social Kitchen is open to to Housing Executive tenants every Tuesday (Whitegates Community Centre) and Thursday (Bolster Community Marcus St) from 10am to 1pm - registered members can pop in for a free bite, cuppa and chat, as well as talking to support staff about any help/signposting they might need. For enquiries please contact <a href="mailto:joanne@bolstercommunity.org">joanne@bolstercommunity.org</a> or call Joanne on 028 3083 5764.	Every Tues & Thurs, Newry.	
Upcoming events	Description	When & Where	
Neon Nightmare (Halloween Disco)	An inclusive night out for our Bolster Buddies, Autism Connect groups and any friends who would like to join us for a night of fancy dress fun and dancing! For ticket enquiries contact Bolster on 028 3083 5764.	Wed 29th Oct, Canal Court Newry, 7.30pm-10pm	
Sip & Shop - Social Enterprise Festive Market	Join us and lots of other local social enterprises at Whitegates Community Centre for our biggest Sip & Shop yet, support local and social! #giftthatgiveback. For enquiries contact Bolster on 028 3083 5764.	Thurs 27th Nov, Whitegates Community Centre	