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BOLSTER COMMUNITY



Newsletter



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Southern Health
and Social Care Trust

Honouring Jacinta's Legacy & Looking Ahead



There are very few people whose vision, determination and values leave a lasting mark on an organisation, a community and the countless lives they touch. For the past 22 years, Jacinta Linden has done exactly that. As many of you will know, Jacinta is moving on to a secondment with the Department of Health, where she will take up the role of Co-Director of Together for Families. While we are delighted that her expertise, passion and leadership are being recognised at such a significant level, we could not let this moment pass without reflecting on the extraordinary legacy she has built at Bolster.

Twenty-two years ago, Jacinta founded Bolster with a simple but powerful mission: to make things better for children and families in South Down. What began as a one-person operation has grown into an award-winning charity and social enterprise supporting parents, children, older people, and adults with learning disabilities and autism across the Southern Health and Social Care Trust region. Growth can sometimes lead organisations away from their original purpose but under Jacinta's leadership that has never happened. Her energy, intelligence and unwavering commitment to doing the right thing have ensured that Bolster remains every bit as values-driven today as it was on day one. She has challenged systems, championed communities, amplified unheard voices, and led with integrity, courage and compassion throughout. Having worked alongside Jacinta since 2011, I have had the privilege of witnessing the impact of her leadership first-hand. I have also benefited greatly from her generosity with her time, her willingness to share knowledge, and her commitment to developing others. Her mentorship, support and friendship have shaped my own professional journey and provided countless opportunities to learn and grow.

As I take on the role of Interim CEO during Jacinta's secondment, I do so with a deep understanding of Bolster's mission and an unwavering commitment to the people and communities we serve. Over the past fifteen years, I have been proud to contribute to Bolster's growth and development, helping to build services, partnerships and opportunities that make a real difference in people's lives. My previous experience across the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland, the UK and Europe reinforced my belief in the power of early intervention, prevention and community-led solutions. Like Jacinta, I firmly believe in empowerment rather than rescue. The earlier we can work alongside individuals and families, the greater the opportunity to prevent crisis and create lasting positive change. Supported by an exceptional team and a committed Board of Trustees, I look forward to building on the strong foundations already in place and continuing to deliver high-quality services that help people thrive.

As we look ahead, our focus remains on growing our impact while staying true to the values that have always defined Bolster Community. While Jacinta may be stepping away from her day-to-day role for a time, her influence will continue to be felt throughout the organisation. On behalf of everyone at Bolster, I thank her for her vision, determination and unwavering belief that things can always be made better. We wish her every success in this exciting new chapter and remain committed to carrying that vision forward for the benefit of people, families and communities across our region.

Allison
Interim CEO, Bolster Community

Golf Classic 2026

We're delighted to share a special moment for our organisation as we launch our Golf Classic 2026 Fundraiser. This event represents so much more than a day on the course. It reflects the strength of community, partnership and shared purpose that continues to drive our work forward. At the heart of this launch is our sincere thanks to our headline sponsor, Cunningham, whose support is already making a real and lasting difference. Because of Cunningham's generosity, the funds raised through this fundraiser will go directly into supporting the people and communities we work with every day. That means helping families who need a bit of extra support, creating connection and care for older people, and opening up opportunities that allow people of all abilities to thrive and feel included. It's these kinds of partnerships that turn an event like this into something genuinely impactful.

We would also like to extend our appreciation to Eamon Connolly and John Linden for their continued encouragement and support, along with our wider network of friends and partners including Newry Chamber, WBR Chamber of Commerce, Newry BID, Bank of Ireland, Warrenpoint Golf Club, and Warrenpoint Golf Club Past & Present. Your backing helps bring this event to life in a way that feels rooted in community from start to finish.

By the time this reaches print, the Golf Classic will either be underway or already complete, but the impact of what everyone has contributed will continue long after the final putt. Whether you played, sponsored, donated, or simply helped spread the word, you've been part of something meaningful. And really, that's what this is all about. People coming together, having a bit of craic along the way and making a genuine, lasting difference together. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you.



CUNNINGHAM

SPONSOR



Joining the Dots Returns for 2026!

We're delighted to reflect on the success of our recent Joining the Dots event, proudly sponsored by the Department of Health NI. More than just a networking event, the day brought together organisations, professionals and community partners who share a common goal of making a positive difference in the lives of people across our communities.

Through collaboration, shared learning and meaningful conversations, the event highlighted the strength of partnership working and the value of connecting services to better support individuals and families. It was wonderful to see so many organisations come together to build relationships, share knowledge and explore opportunities for future collaboration.

A sincere thank you to everyone who attended and contributed to the day's success, and a special congratulations to our own Victoria for her hard work in organising such a valuable and impactful event.



Well done!

Event funded by:



DoH

www.health-ni.gov.uk



Pictured are some of our Home 2 Hospital drivers at Christmas dinner celebrations in 2025.



In recognition of their outstanding contribution, the drivers were visited in Warrenpoint by then Health Minister Robin Swann.

Home2Hospital Transport Service Secures Funding for 2025/26

Good news for local residents as funding has been secured from Newry, Mourne and Down District Council to continue the Home2Hospital transport service throughout 2026!!

This service provides essential transport support for older people living in the rural Slieve Gullion and Mournes DEA areas who need to attend out-of-area hospital appointments. Thanks to the dedication of our volunteer drivers, more than 5,500 journeys have already been completed, helping local people access vital healthcare while reducing the stress and isolation often associated with travelling to appointments. We are particularly keen to encourage older people in the Newcastle area to register for the service and benefit from this valuable support. We are also seeking additional volunteer drivers to join our team and make a difference in their community. If you are aged 60 or over and need assistance getting to hospital appointments, or if you would like to volunteer, please contact Paula at admin@bolstercommunity.org or call 028 3083 5764 for more information.



Launch of Our “No Filters” Youth Programme

Bolster Community is excited to launch NO FILTERS, a new youth programme designed to support young people aged 12-18 to build confidence, develop life skills and make meaningful connections. Through a range of fun, interactive activities focused on wellbeing, communication, leadership and teamwork, participants will have the opportunity to shape the programme around the issues that matter most to them, creating a positive environment to learn, grow and thrive.

No Filters is supported through PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), and will be delivered through existing youth groups across the area. If your youth group would like to find out more about getting involved, please contact Victoria at victoria@bolstercommunity.org or call 028 3083 5764.



NO-FILTER





Student Volunteering opportunities

Would you like to make a positive difference to someone, gain experience and develop new skills within our hospitals, feel a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment? Then this opportunity could be for you.

We are looking for reliable, encouraging and supportive individuals for an hour or two a week.



Meal Time Support

By providing encouragement and support to patients at meal times you could help them eat and enjoy their meal and receive good nutrition.





This volunteer role ideal for those students interested in medicine, nursing or any of the allied health professional roles

Autism, Mentruation & Mental Health

We recently hosted an inspiring event focused on women's health and autism, bringing together researchers, clinicians, lived-experience experts and autistic women to explore an area that has too often been overlooked.

Professor Alison MacKenzie opened the event by encouraging the audience to "trust the word of an autistic woman." She highlighted how autism research has historically focused on men and boys, leaving many autistic women and girls overlooked because they did not fit the established medical model. Alison explored the impact this has across healthcare, education and wider society, where autistic women are too often treated as "non-knowers" despite being experts in their own experiences.

Author Christine Doyle shared insights from her research and book, *HormoneFULL, not Hormonal*, which captures the experiences of 101 autistic women and AFAB individuals. Through powerful lived-experience accounts, she highlighted the impact of hormonal changes on mental health and wellbeing. One participant shared, "I sometimes feel suicidal before my period... every month," while another explained, "My ADHD medication isn't effective the two weeks before my menstrual cycle." Her presentation reinforced the urgent need for greater awareness, understanding, and research in this area.

Dr Lisa Neligan discussed the physical and hormonal changes women experience throughout life, highlighting the unique challenges many neurodivergent women face. She emphasised the importance of self-advocacy, encouraging attendees to seek support when needed: "Don't rest until you get help. Seek help until you get it." Claire Collins then shared her personal journey of navigating hormonal changes as an autistic woman, bringing the day's themes to life through honest and relatable lived experience.

The event concluded with a powerful panel discussion facilitated by Martina McAloon, alongside Alison MacKenzie, Christine Doyle, Claire Collins, Dr Lisa Neligan, and Clare McClure. A clear message emerged throughout the day: autistic women's voices matter, and their experiences must be heard, respected, and valued. Special thanks must go to our colleague, Sharon, whose hard work made the event possible. Her passion for advancing understanding of women's health and autism helped create a meaningful and impactful event that resonated with everyone in attendance. There was a strong sense of connection and validation throughout the day, with many participants expressing how powerful it was to hear autistic women's experiences centred and recognised. The event left attendees feeling informed, inspired and motivated to continue the conversation and advocate for change. This is the beginning.



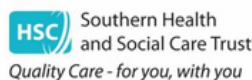
Good Luck, Sean!

We are incredibly proud to share that Sean, one of our dedicated Peer Mentors within the Autism Connect programme, has been shortlisted in the Making a Difference (Individual) award category at this year's Learning Disabilities and Autism Awards on 18th July 2026. Alongside working full-time, Sean generously gives his time to support others through Autism Connect and as a certified walk leader, always brings warmth, kindness and understanding to those around him. Using his own experiences to encourage and support others, Sean helps create safe spaces where people can connect, grow and thrive. His positive impact on our community is felt by so many. Sean's dedication, compassion, and willingness to go above and beyond embody everything we value at Autism Connect. Down-to-earth, approachable, and always ready with a smile, he makes everyone feel welcome and valued. This nomination is a truly well-deserved recognition of the difference Sean makes everyday, and we are incredibly grateful for his commitment, enthusiasm, and unwavering support. Congratulations, Sean, and good luck. We'll all be cheering you on at Team Bolster! ♥



good luck

Funded by:



A Warm Welcome to Our New Team Members!



Hi, I'm Victoria, new Head of Services -part-time foodie, full-time coffee fiend, and occasional tea leaf reader (with a very low success rate). Outside work, I'm usually taking my dog swimming, walking by the water, or convincing myself one more coffee is a sensible idea. For me, community is about people feeling connected and supported, especially at the times when life feels heavy or isolating. It's knowing there are people around you who listen, show up, and remind you that you're not doing everything alone. Even small things- a chat, a check-in, a shared laugh, or someone putting the kettle on- can make a huge difference.



Hi, I'm Fiona, a Family Support Practitioner. A little fact about me is that I'm happiest when I'm spending time with my family and friends and planning my next adventure. Community to me is having people around you who celebrate your success, support you through challenges and remind you that you don't have to face everything alone.



Hi, I'm Michaela, the Communications Officer at Bolster. A little fact about me is that I LOVE to travel. Solo trips (where you can meet an organised group there to travel safely with) are some of the best experiences I've ever had! At one point I was sailing round Croatian islands with 20+ Australians! To me, community is all about no one feeling left out. Having a place where everyone can come together, feel welcome and help each other out.



Hiya, I'm Bróna. The Office manager (maternity cover). A fun fact about me is that I love traveling and discovering new cultures. Whether it's wandering through historic city streets, trying local food, or finding hidden gems off the beaten path, I enjoy the adventure of exploring places I've never been before. Community to me means connection, belonging, and learning from others. As someone who loves traveling, I've come to appreciate how different communities around the world bring people together through culture, kindness, and shared experiences.

What Have Our Candle-Makers Got Coming Up?



Over July, August and into September, our Buddies (including our brilliant candle-makers) have a really exciting few months ahead filled with activity, connection, hard work and plenty of fun. They'll be continuing their all-ability cricket sessions, alongside trips like Bangor darts and a Toy Story cinema outing, giving everyone the chance to enjoy shared experiences and try something new. Their ongoing "Caring for Our World" project will also continue to grow, keeping creativity and environmental awareness at the heart of what they do! There are some great community-based outings planned too, including shopping days using public transport and a visit to Hillsborough in partnership with our outdoor partners, plus table tennis sessions to keep everyone active and engaged. And of course, there's a very special milestone coming up. Their graduation celebration, a chance to recognise achievements and mark how far everyone has come. They are also building towards an exciting upcoming residential, so stay tuned for more details soon... there's plenty to look forward to!



Summer, In A Candle.

Capture the essence of summer with Acorn Candles' handcrafted collection. From the warmth of long summer evenings to the fresh breeze rolling across our shores, our fragrances are inspired by the landscapes and moments that make this season special. At the heart of this year's collection are Lough Neagh Dawn and Lough Neagh Dusk, two signature scents inspired by the beauty and tranquillity of Ireland's largest lough. These customer favourites capture the changing moods of the local landscape, from the soft light of sunrise to the calm stillness of dusk.

Every Acorn Candle is lovingly handcrafted by a team of talented young adults with mixed abilities through Acorn, a social enterprise owned by our parent charity, Bolster Community. Each purchase helps provide meaningful work experience, develop practical skills, and create opportunities for young people to contribute to a thriving social enterprise.



Discover your signature scent for warmer days.

Lough Neagh Dusk carries an additional community impact. For every candle sold, £2 is donated to Crisis Café in Newry, supporting mental health and wellbeing within the local community. The candle is further enhanced by artwork hand-painted by local artist Amira McDonagh, making each purchase a celebration of local talent, craftsmanship and social impact.

While the Scents of Home collection remains at the heart of what we do, our range extends far beyond these signature fragrances. Customer favourites such as Thai Lemongrass & Ginger, Black Plum & Rhubarb and Fresh Linen ensure there is a scent to suit every home and every season. Acorn Candles also make thoughtful gifts for weddings, celebrations, corporate events and special occasions. Better still, each reusable tin can enjoy a second life as a planter or storage container—because great things shouldn't end when the candle does.



Thank you

ORDER ONLINE OR INSTORE

Order online at: www.acornshop.co.uk

Contact us at: 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