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BOLSTER COMMUNITY

Newsletter



Where Community Grows

This Newsletter is funded by:



Southern Health
and Social Care Trust

Spring is finally here! Bringing with it brighter mornings, lighter evenings, and that welcome feeling of warmth returning to our days. It's a season of renewal, of stepping forward, and of reconnecting. And this month, our community is doing exactly that. At the heart of this issue is our Discover & Connect Event, created especially with our senior community in mind. It's an opportunity for seniors to come together, learn about the supports, activities and groups available, and strengthen the friendships that make such a difference in everyday life. A special and heartfelt thank you to staff member Paula, whose vision, dedication and hard work made this event possible. Her commitment to creating welcoming spaces for our seniors is something truly worth celebrating. We're so grateful for the energy she brings to our community.

This month also shines a light on the many ways you can stay active, connected and inspired. From the welcoming atmosphere of Clover Club, to the conversation and comfort found at Tots & Tea, and the delicious creativity of our Social Kitchen, Star Bites 57. There are so many ways to for you get involved. If you're ready to embrace the fresh air, our walking groups are stepping into spring with renewed momentum.

Be sure to turn to Top Tips with Tanya this month. Tanya continues to lead our evidence-based parenting programme in collaboration with the SHSCT, supporting parents and caregivers of children aged 6 to 11. This practical guidance focuses on building children's confidence, encouraging positive behaviour and supporting learning at home. These sessions are grounded in proven approaches but delivered in a way that feels supportive, relatable and encouraging. It's a wonderful opportunity for parents to gain tools, share experiences and feel more confident in their parenting journey.

We're especially proud of our Buddies page in this issue. You'll see familiar faces, shared moments and snapshots of the friendships that continue to grow through our programme, as well as a fond farewell to long-time candle-maker Steven. These pages reflect the true heart of what we do, from the check-ins, the encouragement, the companionship to the quiet support that means so much.

Our Acorn Spring Edition page celebrates growth in its own way, highlighting the energy, participation and new ideas blossoming across our groups. Spring reminds us that it's never too late to start something new, reconnect with others, or take that first step back into community life. And of course, don't forget to follow us on socials to find out more about are programmes! There are new sessions beginning, favourites returning, and plenty of opportunities to get involved. Whether you're a parent, a grandparent, a senior member, or someone simply looking to connect, there is something here for you. If something catches your eye, this could be the perfect time to take that step. Spring is about action. It's about warmth. It's about showing up, for yourself, for your family, and for each other.



A fond farewell from staff to long-time candle-maker Steven O' Hanlon.

On to the next chapter. We will miss you Steven!!



Discover & Connect in Hilltown

Over 130 seniors from across the Crotlieve area came together on Thursday, 26 February, for Bolster Community's Discover & Connect event at the INF Hall in Hilltown. With more than 15 local services in attendance, the afternoon provided a fantastic opportunity for older people to socialise, explore support available in their community, and strengthen connections.

Local groups including The Cosy Club, The Sunshine Club, The Plough On, and The Clover Club were among those represented, showcasing the strong network of services and vibrant community spirit across the area.

Guests enjoyed a lively and uplifting afternoon – reconnecting with friends, sharing stories, and dancing to live music from Billy Finnegan. From laughter over lunch to a busy dance floor, the atmosphere was filled with warmth, joy, and celebration.

Allison Slater, Head of Operations at Bolster Community, said:

"We're delighted to welcome so many people to Discover & Connect. The turnout has surpassed our expectations. The event also allowed us to extend our Not Done Yet research survey. We invite all over-60s to share their thoughts on what would help them live well now and in the future via our online survey <https://bit.ly/not-done-yet-survey>. For those who prefer, the survey can also be completed by phone or post – please contact us on 028 3083 5764."



Sinéad Ennis MLA also welcomed attendees, commenting: "What a brilliant event by Bolster Community, bringing together so many organisations to support our community as we age. It's vital to know what services are available, especially in rural South Down. Seeing so many seniors enjoying themselves reminds us of the importance of connection at every age."

The event was made possible thanks to funding from Bank of Ireland through the Begin Together Community Fund, supported by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland. Special thanks to Noel Moan from The Newry Democrat for capturing the day, and to the students from St Mark's High School, whose enthusiasm and support were invaluable. Bolster Community extends heartfelt thanks to all staff, volunteers, and partner organisations who helped make the day such a success.

Particular recognition goes to Paula McCracken for her ongoing dedication to supporting seniors in our community.

Based in Newry and Kilkeel, Bolster Community is a values-led charity committed to empowering individuals, families, and communities. Through a wide range of programmes and services, we promote resilience, inclusion, and wellbeing – helping people grow, connect, and thrive. Stay up to date with our latest news and events by following us on Facebook.



This project has been supported by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland through BOI Cost of Living.

SENIORS

FAMILY

ABILITY

Clover Club

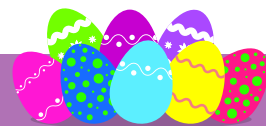
At Clover Club this spring, it's the perfect time for new friendships to bloom! Our fortnightly gatherings for over 60s from Newry and surrounding areas are full of arts & crafts, quizzes, talks, and relaxed chats over light refreshments. Every session is a fresh chance to connect and enjoy the season together. What's next this spring: step into the sunshine, try something new, and share laughter and conversation with your community. Come along, grow, and belong.

Tots & Tea

Tots and Tea is a friendly group of parents and carers with children who are taking their first steps on the journey through disability. We meet up every week, creating a welcoming space where families can feel understood, supported, and connected. Spring is all about discovery, and at Tots and Tea, little ones explore the world one sensory adventure at a time. From bubbles to dry pasta, each session encourages curiosity and playful learning. Meanwhile, parents and carers can enjoy a supportive, relaxed space to connect over tea. This spring: watch your child's imagination bloom while you build friendships with other families. Every visit brings fresh ideas, laughter, and small moments of joy that make the season shine.

Social Kitchen STAR BITES 57

Spring is also a great time to connect, refresh, and enjoy practical support. Social Kitchen is a welcoming space for Housing Executive tenants, or those on the waiting list, to enjoy a nutritious light bite, a friendly chat, and access advice on forms, appointments, and community services. Special activities like boccia, trips, or themed events happen occasionally, adding extra fun to our regular sessions. This spring: come along and make the most of the support and connections available. For full details, times, and contact information, check our latest programme page at the back of this newsletter, you'll always find a warm welcome waiting!



Monthly Silent Reading Nights

We're delighted to introduce Silent Reading Nights at the Cozy Corner Café, from 7pm-9pm on selected evenings. Bring along your current read, settle into a comfy corner and enjoy the gentle company of fellow book lovers. There's no pressure to chat, just a peaceful space to unwind and be. These evenings are neurodivergent-friendly and open to all, creating a calm and welcoming atmosphere for anyone who simply wants quiet connection. You're very welcome to purchase a warm drink from the café on the night. We're so grateful to the Cozy Corner for providing the perfect snug courtyard setting for an evening of books and calm. To find out when these evenings are and to secure your place, email sarah@bolstercommunity.org



Supporting Families to Grow & Thrive This Spring

Spring is a season of growth, new beginnings, and fresh possibilities. For families in particular, it's the perfect time to nurture both children and parents. That's why our Family Support Practitioner, Tanya, will be co-facilitating the Parent Plus Programme with the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, starting 4th March. This 9-week programme isn't just about strategies, it's about empowering parents to help their children flourish emotionally, build confidence, and develop positive behaviour. Strong, supported parents create strong, resilient children, and small changes at home can have a big, lasting impact on family life.

By taking part, families gain practical tools, a supportive space to share experiences, and guidance to face challenges with confidence. If you or someone you know is interested in taking part in this session or further sessions, please send an email to tanya@bolstercommunity.org.



FAMILY WELLBEING WALKING GROUP



WELLBEING WALKS FOR ALL

Beat the January blues and join us for a 6 week walking group which will start Friday 16th January.

We'll be walking in Derrymore Woods and afterwards we'll enjoy some light refreshments.

Everyone is welcome from mums & tots, to seniors. If you do need 1-1 support, please bring a chaperone.

AT A GLANCE

- This group will meet each for six sessions, starting Friday 16th Jan and finishing 27th March.
- The meeting time each week will be 11am (Derrymore Woods).
- This group will be facilitated by an experienced walk leader, however if 1-1 support is required, please bring a chaperone.

bolstercommunity.org

 Call us to register your place on 028 3083 5764

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Walk For Your Well-being

Walking isn't just gentle exercise. it's a powerful way to boost both your physical and mental wellbeing. From improving heart health and stamina to reducing stress and lifting your mood, regular walks can make a real difference to how you feel every day. And when you walk with others, it's even better. Sharing conversation, laughter, and the simple joys of being outdoors strengthens connections and helps us feel part of a supportive community.

That's exactly what our Walking Warriors group is all about! Join like-minded people for refreshing walks, friendly chats, and the chance to enjoy nature while looking after your health. Whether you're new to walking or a seasoned explorer, everyone is welcome. See the poster for more details on our "Wellbeing Walking Group" or join our newest "Walking Warriors" by emailing sharon@bolstercommunity.org.

Sean has long been a vital part of our community as an Autism Connect Peer Mentor. We are delighted to share that he has reached a fantastic new milestone: Sean is now a certified Walk Leader for Walking Warriors!



Sean shares his life experiences with our An Droichead students.



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We want to hear about your experience of using equipment that helps you live more independently.

By sharing your story, you can help us improve services for everyone across Northern Ireland. Your story is private/confidential.

You can access the survey by scanning the QR code or visiting the link below.

If you would like a printed version or assistance, contact us:

 028 9536 1124

 10000morevoices@hscni.net

<https://tinyurl.com/10KMVATE>



10000
TEN THOUSAND MORE VOICES

HSC Public Health
Agency



A Fond Farewell to Steven



There were many tears on 4th February as we said goodbye to one of our very first Bolster Buddies, Steven. Steven joined us as a (very tall!) 20-year-old, just beginning his transition from education into the “big bad world.” At that time, Bolster Buddies didn’t even have a name, but we knew there were many young people like Steven in our community: young people with so much to offer, who deserved friendship, support, and the opportunity to be at the heart of a community where they could truly flourish.

Over the years, Steven has given us countless proud moments. From his first trip to the pub with friends, to bravely singing Caledonia at our Sip & Shop event (not a dry eye in the room, mind you!) , Steven has continually inspired us. We’ve watched him confidently take part in a journalist interview, try paddleboarding for the first time, and proudly bring his family to see his billboard in the Buttercrane. But more than the milestones, Steven brought something even more special: fun, laughter, kindness, and a deep love for his fellow “Buddies.”

When we first met him, supported living felt a million miles away. Seeing him now take this next step is a powerful reminder that Bolster Buddies isn’t just about candle-making or social events, it’s about being part of a much bigger journey. It’s about walking alongside our young people as they grow in confidence and independence, supporting them to step out and live their very best lives.

Steven, there will always be a piece of you in Bolster.





Spring Awakens with our 'Scents of Home' Collection

This spring, let your home be filled with the scents that celebrate our local landscapes. From the crisp morning air of Gullion Breeze to the gentle waters of Strangford Sails, each candle is handcrafted with care by our talented makers, bringing a little piece of home into your space. Celebrate the beauty of our local landscapes this spring with the Scents of Home collection from Acorn. Each candle is inspired by the sights, scents, and breezes of our beloved region:

- Gullion Breeze - crisp and refreshing, like a walk through Slieve Gullion's rolling hills
- Strangford Sails - a gentle, salty scent that captures the spirit of Strangford Lough
- Mourne Echoes - earthy and calming, reminiscent of the Mourne Mountains' quiet beauty
- Carlingford Whispers - soft and uplifting, evoking the peaceful charm of Carlingford Bay



A difference to families, young people, seniors and everyone in our community.

Every single candle is handcrafted by our skilled candle-makers of mixed abilities, and we take great pride in every creation. It's more than a candle, it's a piece of home. Bring the springtime spirit indoors and celebrate the landscapes we love.

Find Your Favourite Scent

Looking for variety? From the serene freshness of Lough Neagh Dawn to the zesty lift of Thai Lemongrass, our wide range of candles has something for everyone. Everyone has a favourite. Discover yours today! Every ACORN candle you buy brings money right back into our local community. It makes a difference.



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.



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