



**WEST
LOTHIAN
YOUTH
ACTION
PROJECT**



**ANNUAL
REPORT**

www.wlyap.org.uk

2023-2024



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Foreword

It is with great pride that we present the West Lothian Youth Action Project's Annual Report for 2023/2024. This year has been one of significant challenges, with the continuing impact of the cost-of-living crisis, rising mental health needs, and growing demands on support services. Despite this, WLYAP has remained steadfast in addressing the complex needs of young people, their families, communities, delivering meaningful interventions and forging ahead with vital projects.

Our dedicated staff and partners have continued to prioritise mental health and wellbeing, addressing the isolation, anxiety, and uncertainty faced by many. Services like Roots, which provides invaluable family support, and the Wraparound Project, in partnership with West Lothian Drug and Alcohol Service and Circle West Lothian, have had a profound impact, offering innovative approaches to tackling substance use and supporting vulnerable families.

We are also proud of the continued success of projects such as Tooled Up, which has empowered young people with practical skills in joinery and landscaping, helping them explore future career pathways. INtegr8, our befriending service, was awarded a Quality in Befriending Excellence Award this year, a testament to its transformative role in supporting vulnerable young people. Growing Together, in collaboration with Almond Housing Association and Spark, has strengthened community cohesion through gardening and green-space projects. Meanwhile, the Music Group has provided young people with a creative outlet to develop new skills and express themselves.

The relationships we have built with local schools, communities, and partners such as West Lothian College, The Larder, and Project Scotland through initiatives like the Cashback Connecting Communities Project, demonstrate the power of collaboration in driving positive change. These partnerships not only extend the reach of our services but also strengthen our collective capacity to make a real difference.

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to Helen for her exceptional leadership and unwavering dedication throughout this challenging year. Her tireless efforts to guide and support the project, its staff, and the communities we serve have been instrumental in sustaining and advancing our mission. Helen's commitment exemplifies the heart of WLYAP, and we are truly fortunate to have her at the helm.

Finally, we acknowledge the incredible support from our funders, including Corra and Cashback for Communities, as well as the communities and young people we work alongside. Their engagement and trust inspire us to continue striving for a brighter future.

As we look ahead, we are optimistic about what we can achieve together. With strengthened partnerships, impactful services, and a collective vision, WLYAP will remain a cornerstone of support and opportunity for West Lothian's young people and families.

Thank you to all who contribute to the success of this organisation—your efforts are what make this possible.

WLYAP Board of Directors

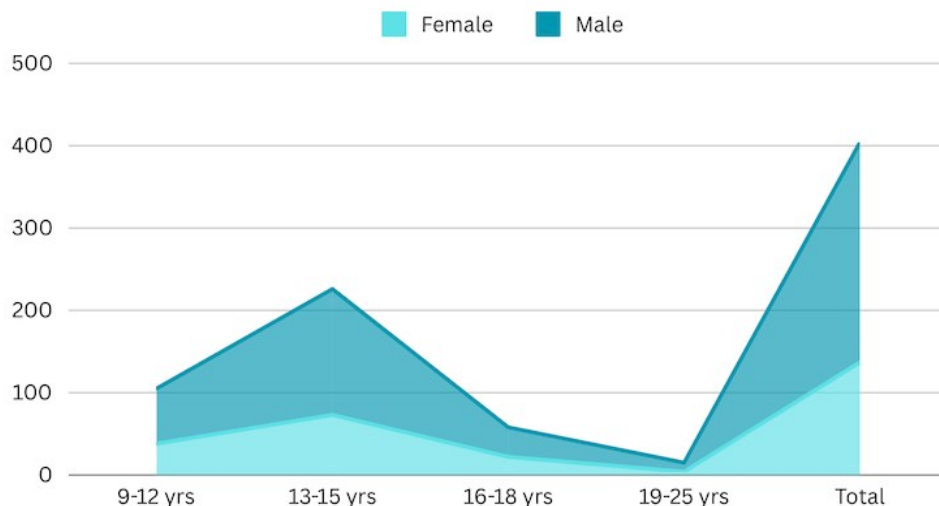
Partnerships

Youth Action Project is involved in many Partnership programmes across West Lothian, helping to bring both local and national organisations into the region.



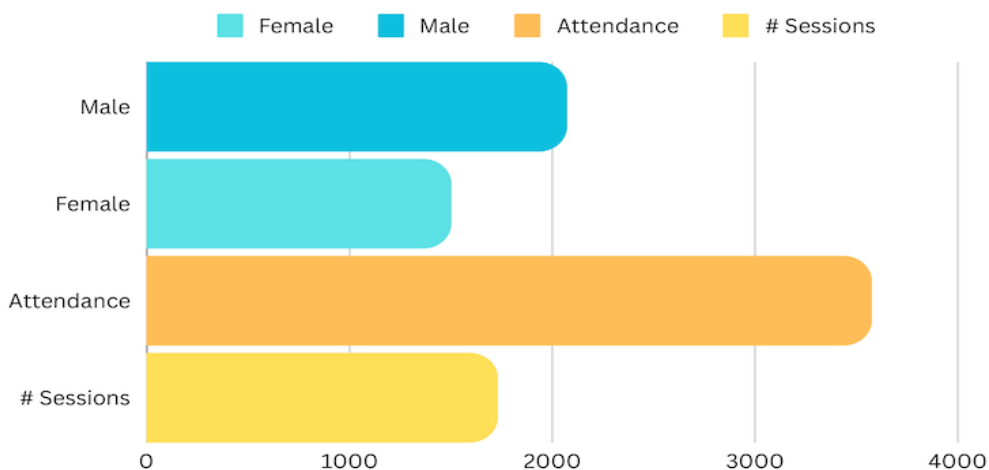
Groupwork and 1-1 Sessions

Individual Attenders Gender Breakdown



Total Attendees across all sessions **3,577**

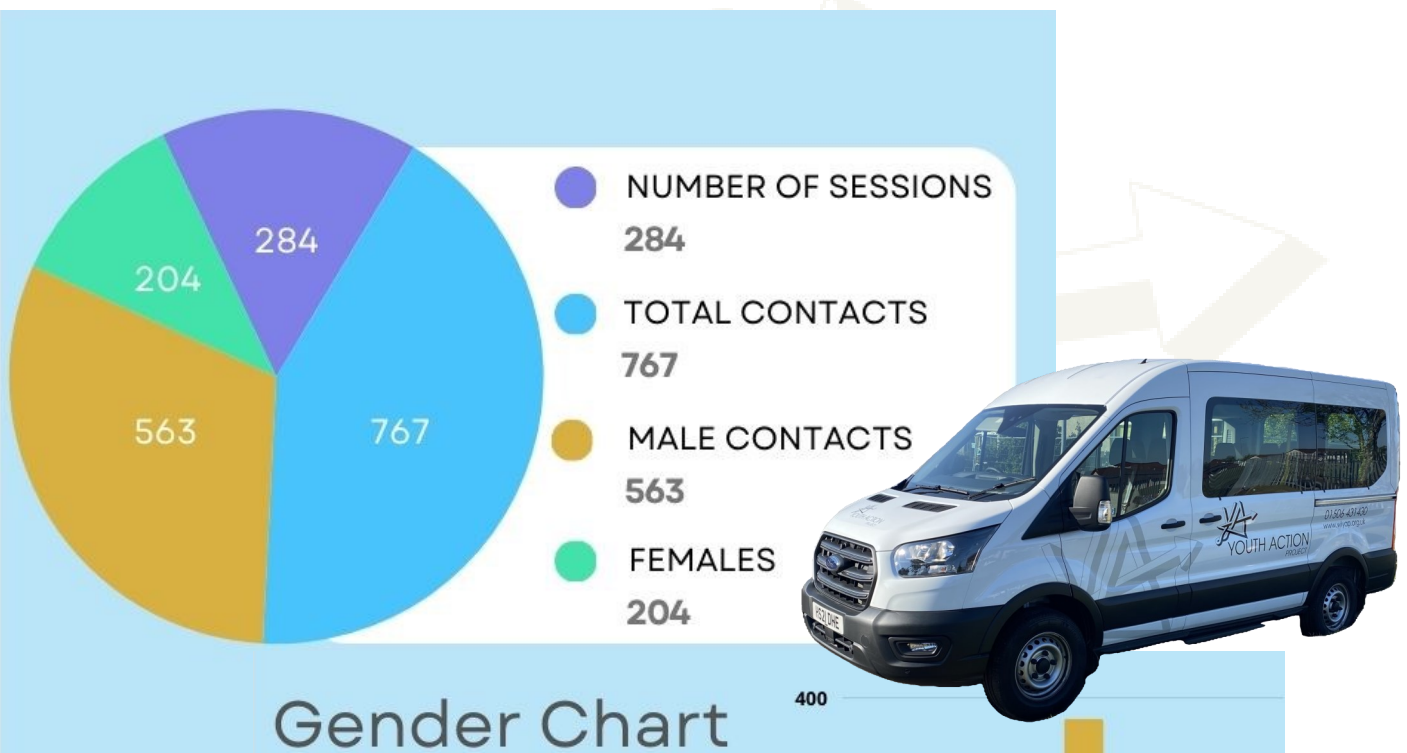
Number of sessions provided **1,732**



Streetwork Service

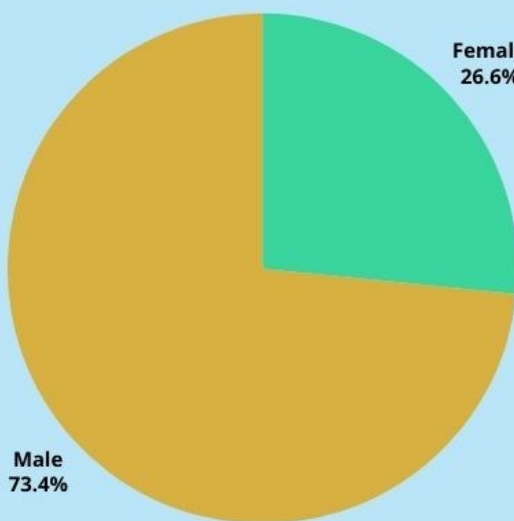
Our detached streetwork service remains an essential mechanism to engage with young people most disengaged from services and at times at risk, although they don't always recognise this. Since the Pandemic and due to the change in culture around communication between young people, often relying on social media rather than face to face contact, the numbers that congregate on the streets of West Lothian are now markedly lower. However, as part of the Community Safety process in West Lothian it is a vital intervention service.

Our 14-15 age range, and those identifying as male, continue to be the highest contacts. Interestingly we have a slight trend change with an increase in the number of engagements with females between the ages of 11 -13, a potential concern that will be monitored by all partners.



Gender Chart

Gender / Age comparison



Youth Drop-ins

For many years, the Youth Action Project has supported a number of informal drop-in sessions for young people to socialise safely get involved in activities and have the opportunity to build positive and often long-lasting trusted relationships with staff members.

We are currently supporting sessions in Addiewell, Blackburn and Stoneyburn, and are very grateful to the support and partnership working that we have established with Addiewell Community Centre Management Committee, Loganlea Miners welfare, Community Action Blackburn, Blackburn Partnership Centre Management Committee, Stoneyburn and Bents Vision group and others involved in regeneration groups. These partnerships allow us to operate these drop-in sessions.

At times it is difficult to evidence the benefits of these informal youth sessions, particularly to those who are not involved in the field of youth and community work, however, we know how important they are to increase social interaction, provide new opportunities, and the chance to provide information and education out with an educational establishment.

The comments below from young people far outweigh the benefits that workers can describe:

“The Blackburn drop-in gives us something to do, there are no others for our older age range, we can play pool, computer games, football and have a laugh, we’re always hungry so it’s great when Helen manages to get Greggs for us. Joe and Kath run the group, they are good to us, Joe has to rein us in sometimes but in a friendly way.”

“It is a place to relax and have fun, but we know that we can ask for help or get advice when we need it. Even the older guys who used to attend come and visit sometimes to get a catch up or ask advice from the staff.”

“The youth club is the only good thing for teenagers in Addiewell, it keeps us out of trouble and is a safe place to talk about our worries and struggles.”

“The youthie is something we all look forward to every Tuesday, we can bombard Kirsty and Alec with all our problems, and we know they will always listen, the Youthie is our safe space.”

“So basically we need this club, if you know Addiewell, then you’ll know it’s rubbish, and this is the only good thing we have for our age. Also the staff are good and positive, for some they are the only good role models.”

“ The Wee Croft, is a safe space to talk, nobody judges us, we can meet friends and we go on outings in the summer. Hopefully we’ll get a new console soon though !”

INtegr8

Befriending Is.... making connections.

Although primarily a one-to-one, face-to-face service, INtegr8 befriending at the Youth Action Project aims to reduce social isolation and will take the opportunity to build connections for the young people worked with whenever possible.



Connections can be made between the volunteers on the befriending team who can link together with their matched young people to encourage positive relationship building in a safe environment. Connections can be developed between young people who, at times or if/when appropriate, can choose to keep in contact with each other during involvement in the service, or even beyond. Connections can be made with other professionals and workers where relevant and necessary to ensure the best outcomes are sought for children, young people, and their families.

Working together can contribute to better chances and opportunities for young people supported, volunteers can feel less isolated in their role, and partner organisations can access additional relevant information needed to be able to make decisions and support their clients while keeping the befriending service up to date on need to know information within the boundaries of confidentiality.

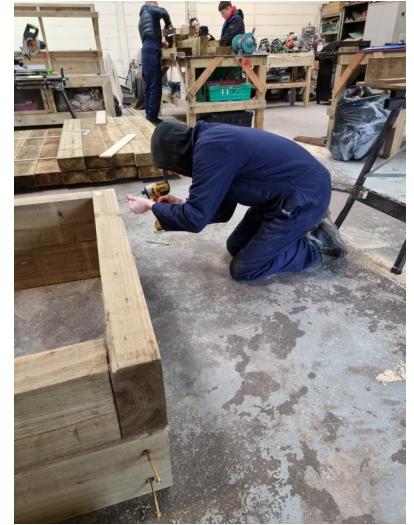


INtegr8 will continue to build connections going forward to maximise benefits for the young people we support.

Tooled Up



The Youth Action Project have for almost ten years, provided young people, primarily, young men, although we do very much welcome young women, with the opportunity to learn basic skills in joinery, landscaping and gardening.



Everyone involved in the world of education will recognise that formal classroom learning does not suit all pupils, many learn through practical action.

Our programmes are delivered in a workshop, or out in community settings.

Barry Walker, Joe Cassidy and latterly Carrie Reid, have worked tirelessly to create different ways to engage young people, referred from a number of schools.

Whitburn Academy has been a longstanding supporter of our work, resulting in the construction of a school garden area which continues to develop with every group we have.



West Calder School selected an excellent set of pupils this year, they have worked in a variety of settings putting tremendous effort into the construction of a large poly tunnel and building many planters for our community garden in Craigshill.

We are delighted to have partnered with the Larder in the CashBack Community Connections programme, providing the young people on this programme with a diverse range of construction opportunities,

Numeracy, hand-to-eye coordination, design, manual handling, tool safety and teamwork are just a few skills achieved through this practical skills programme. The groups also have the opportunity to gain accredited e learning modules.

“Working in partnership with the WLYAP staff Carrie, Joe and Barry has been a absolute pleasure. They are hardworking, dedicated, driven, compassionate in a genuinely rare way, they have a real desire to help change the lives of the YP that they work with, and they do it all with a smile and cracking sense of humour.

They have been an asset to my groups and make partnership working easy and uncomplicated.”

Amanda (The Larder)



Growing Together



We are delighted that the successful partnership with Almond Housing Association can continue to develop, thanks to Investing in Communities awarding funds for the Working Together Project.



The funding has led to exciting developments, the inclusion of a new partner, Spark and during the Autumn, the appointment of a Community Environment Champion, Community Gardener and Activities Co-ordinator.

Strategy and planning has been the primary focus during the first months and each of the employed posts have been getting out and engaging with the community relevant to their role and developing consultation from the people and groups they met with – This is key to ensuring the project is delivered to meet the needs and wants of the people who, live work and are educated in the community.

The off season in the outdoor community space has allowed us to continue building and developing the space, in particular the growing areas with the introduction of an additional 27 raised beds and other structures which were designed, built and filled with the support of 21 local young people, through WLYAP's Tooled Up project, between November 2023 and February 2024 with a total of 819 hours. The space is developing well and will be central to our outdoor environmental and growing workshops and volunteering opportunities whilst aiming to produce large quantities of locally grown fruit and vegetables to contribute to the Community Fridge.



There have been several small events, including Christmas activities, Wreath making workshops and wellbeing events, targeting different groups within the community which have all gone down well with positive feedback received.

Two larger events were held; A Halloween fun day event in the Craigshill Community Garden with nearly 100 attendees from the local community attending to enjoy a fun afternoon of activities and food and meet the Growing Together and Youth Action Project teams. Other agencies were invited to offer advice and support in a more informal setting and capturing an audience they may not have had access to otherwise.



Our Get ready for Winter event was a great success with over 80 attendees coming along to our Winter advice and support session with practical and supportive help and advice from Almond Housing, CAB, WLC, WLYAP and many more. The feedback and response from attendees was great and we plan to follow this up with a Get ready for Summer event and hold these annually.

We have already worked alongside existing local groups and organisations – Woodland trust, WLLPs, RBGE, Transform Craigshill, Regeneration team, Local Schools, and plan to continue building on these great relationships and many more to come.



Wraparound

A partnership project with West Lothian Drug and Alcohol Service and Circle, West Lothian.



Aims

To build strong, positive relationships with young people using or at risk of substance use.
To provide more information around drugs and alcohol, to enable young people to make more informed choices around drugs and alcohol.

Statistics (April 2023 – March 2024):

Total number of young people engaged = 33
Total sessions = 321

Sessions included carrying out the following **diversionary activities** with young people:
Football, boxing, walking, dog-walking, swimming, weight-based gym sessions, art sessions, pool, shopping, badminton.

Sessions also involved holistically supporting young people with the following:
Attendance at appointments (hospital, CAMHS, dentist), signposting to other support agencies, housing support, budgeting, education support, attendance at child planning/ protection meetings.

Drug Education Workshops

Aim of the workshops :

To increase young people's knowledge and understanding of the risks, dangers and overall impact of drug and alcohol use.

Statistics (April 2023-March 2024):

Total number of sessions = 42

Drug education workshops across the year have predominantly focussed on general drug and alcohol awareness, however some workshops have had a specific focus on:

*Alcohol
Nicotine
Ecstasy*

*Tobacco
Ketamine
Cannabis*

We also continue to develop a young people's steering group. This aims to help young people in the Wraparound Service voice their views and perspectives. This aims to help guide, direct and shape the service from a young person's standpoint.

Yap Music

Our Music Club Drop In moved to new premises in November 2023 and we immediately setup a music room and opened the doors for young people in Craigshill and the surrounding areas.



Music is a remarkable carrier of delight and excitement. These and other positive emotions are among our most vital resources: They attract others, lift our mood, and protect us from sadness and even illness. In a world in which families and children experience trauma from violence, war, natural disasters, and other crises, music and the arts can play a powerful role in their healing.

The Carnegie Hall Corporation

“I really enjoy the music club”

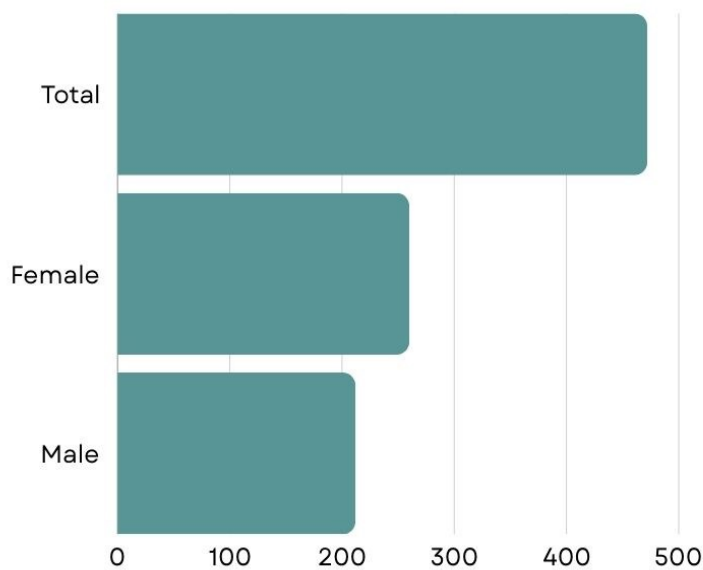
“I get the chance to play in a band”

“I like to learn new songs”

Top Engaging Young People

Records show that 56% of overall attenders are female, rising to 70% between ages 13-15 years.

However, 57% of 16-18 year olds regularly attending are males.



Young People Engagement

472 (2023-24)



Craigshill Community Fridge

YAP did not envisage food poverty would still be an essential provision, but for our most vulnerable families the Community fridge is a lifeline.

Based in the Old Child Disability Centre, next to Spark, having moved from Riverside Community wing due to the impending demolition. Open every Friday morning from 9.30 -12.30, managed and coordinated by YAP, with valuable fortnightly assistance from Almond Housing's Tenancy sustainment Officer and volunteers, without whom it would be exceedingly difficult to run the service.

This facility provides, fruit, vegetables – some grown in the community garden, cheese, ham, eggs, meat, toiletries, and a variety of tinned and ambient produce.

YAP are members of the FareShare and Neighbourly schemes, helping to reduce food waste. It is extremely useful to utilise these schemes, but they do not supply our customers who are in need of staple produce with all essential produce, we always have to buy in produce to supplement the food waste.

The facility is open to all who are struggling with food insecurity, primarily those who live in the Craigshill and local communities, as there are other pantries and community shops throughout West Lothian, sadly evidencing the need throughout this local authority and replication throughout the nation.

The Youth Action Project are members of the West Lothian Food Network, purchasing and sourcing donations of excellent quality food produce. We are all currently working to develop sustainable models for the community fridge/ pantries etc. as funding is limited, with the likelihood of 2024 -25 being the last year that the Scottish government will provide funding to Councils to address food insecurity.

In addition to the Community fridge, we also work with partners, delivering emergency food parcels to referred individuals and families who are known to have hit a crisis point. YAP staff will deliver the essential produce to the homes of those referred, adding another layer of support and communication for these young tenants and families.

An average of 30 – 35 people attend the Community fridge each week, supporting 100-120 people in the Craigshill and wider community.



Homegrown produce from our Community Garden

We have more than 300 members, sadly due to the cost-of-living crisis, the demand is not decreasing. We have had the Citizens Advice shop attending to ensure benefits are maximized, we will be joining the FORT system in the near future to increase our referral capacity for other service support. Like many community-based services, YAP did not envisage food poverty would still be an essential provision, but for our most vulnerable families the Community fridge is a lifeline.

Collaboration and Progression

It is always difficult to cover all the collaborative pieces of work that as an organisation we have achieved during the year, however, I will attempt to comment on our work in addition to the projects previously described.

Developing the CashBack Connecting Communities project with the Larder, West Lothian College and Project Scotland is exciting, we are looking forward to highlighting the huge benefits gained by the young people engaged in this programme over the coming year.

It is always a pleasure working with WL Council's Community Regeneration team officers, the Youth Action Project tries to ensure that we support all communities of West Lothian to the best of our ability, and it is an enormous help to know that we can liaise with this team to keep informed on local developments.

Our partners involved in the Roots Project, continue to be stalwarts to the cause of improving the mental health of Children, Young people and Families. Our appreciation goes to colleagues in Children 1st, Action for Children, Carers of West Lothian, Playworks and Firefly for their shared knowledge, expertise and support.

As Chair of the Children and Families third Sector Forum, I benefit from the chance to network and share our wealth of experiences, it is also a positive connection between the third sector and W.L.Council. The administrative support for this group and the Third Sector Strategic group is provided by our third sector Interface, The Gateway, who work tirelessly to keep us all informed and connected. They also administer the Food Network for the wide range of organisations involved in the reduction of food poverty in West Lothian.

YAP's involvement in the partnership approach to reducing the harm of substance use has allowed us to work with NHS Lothian colleagues, education, Police and third sector organisations.

Working with members of the Mental Health Operational group, in the development of the new WestSpace Website and App has been inspiring. The involvement of many young people in this process, will ensure it suits the needs of the diverse range of our young community when it is launched later this year.

Our links to the Community Learning and Development Youth Services team are extremely valuable and we are excited to see the development of the new 101 space in Livingston Centre.

The partnership work in Blackburn is an area I take personal pleasure in being involved, the Blackburn Action Group, Community Action Blackburn, Blackburn Bonfire Night Action Group and of course CIB, the Change in Blackburn youth group are an inspiration.

My final thanks go to colleagues in the Community Safety Partnership, it has been a pleasure!

West Lothian Youth Action Project

Staff Team 2023/24

Helen Davis † Project Director

Margaret Douglas † Finance Administrator

Lesley Brogan † Drug & Alcohol Youth Worker

Dominic Kane † Drug & Alcohol Youth Worker

Hilda Dolan † Senior Project Worker

Angie Gourdie † Befriending Coordinator

Barry Walker † Workshop Coordinator

Alex Hughes † Activity and 1-1 Coordinator

Gordon Balfour † Music Coordinator

Andrew Gosland † Gardener (Growing Together)

Colin Gilmour † Gardener (Growing Together)

David Tatton † Community Champion (Growing Together)

Joe Cassidy † Project Worker

Kirsty Calderwood † Mental Health Youth Worker

Kathleen Ward † Project Worker

Carrie Reid † Project Worker

Stephen Logue † Project Worker

Kevin Campbell † Project Worker

Tammalynn Hassell † Project Worker

Janet Paisley † Project Worker

Alan Halliday † Janitorial Staff

Jim Sanderson † Janitorial Staff

Many Thanks to Our Sponsors



Board of Directors who served during 2023 - 2024

Janice Turner	Ryan Addison
Ian Colquhoun	Lynne Waddell
Michele Doull	Fiona Rendall
Jock Kerr	Mark Weigt

In addition, the following individuals acted as advisors on the Board and provided support to the organisation

Cllr. Peter Heggie	Cllr Danny Logue	Beverley Akinlami
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WestLothianYouthActionProject

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