



2022/2023

# Annual Impact Report

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Please note our case studies have been anonymised including names and the use of stock images.

# Welcome from our CEO and Chair

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We are delighted to present you with Lead Scotland's Annual Review for the year ending 31st March 2023.

As we started to emerge from the pandemic during this reporting period, fiscal challenges and the cost-of-living crisis came sharply into focus. Too many disabled people and carers in Scotland continued to experience poverty, loneliness, unemployment, digital exclusion and discrimination. We were well positioned to offer accessible learning, befriending and helpline services which enable people to build confidence, skills and become agents of change.

In the face of increasing demand for community-based adult learning opportunities we have been agile and successful as a contracting organisation, increasing our income by 11% securing existing projects and taking up new contracts to extend our range of learning and employability services by 44%.

We successfully applied to J. P. Morgan's Force for Good Programme. This productive private sector /charity sector partnership opportunity saw our staff, volunteers and learners working with their dedicated team for eight months before launching an accessible, affordable, online learning platform: [www.my.lead.org.uk](http://www.my.lead.org.uk). The first tranche of courses about digital accessibility and cyber resilience have been welcomed by learners and practitioners.



The Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland was launched in May 2022 by the Scottish Government, heralding system change and equitable provision for adults across Scotland. We have been involved in the development of this new strategy from the start, strongly advocating for a focus on access and inclusion.

As part of our commitment to close the disability employment gap this we paid ten disabled people to co-write two new helpline guides for us which are enriched by their lived experience.

There's no doubt we are deeply concerned about fiscal challenges which threaten to squeeze our funders and budgets even tighter, but we are determined to look forward with hope. We have an ambitious strategic plan for 2023 to 2026, we are determined to find and take up opportunities to reduce educational and social exclusion and we have a growing number of supporters and partners by our side.

Emma Whitelock (CEO)

Paul Smith (Chair of our Board of Trustees)



# 22-23 Strategic Dashboard

## Objective

Increase the number of people engaged and progressing in our learning & befriending services per year from 382 to 1,000 by 2023.

Increase the number of disabled people and carers actively participating within communities per year from 150 to 200, by 2023.

Extend our learning and helpline services from 22 to 32 local authority areas across Scotland by 2023.

Increase our unrestricted funding from £42,000 per year to £60,000 by 2023.

## Performance

Under target overall, 876 learners and befriendees, but 44% more local learners.

We supported 160 people to actively participate in their communities.

29 local authority areas between our learning and helpline opportunities

Under target for unrestricted income, £32,149 but over target for restricted income.



# Our Work

876

Learners and  
befriendeds

29

Local  
Authorities

441

Calls  
answered

132

Volunteers



92%

Our volunteers  
felt supported

141

Helpline  
Callers

102

Webinars  
held

1152

People indirectly  
reached





# Learning

Our learning services are located across Scotland, covering a range of areas including employability, digital skills, literacy, cyber safety and confidence building. The main aim of these services is to support disabled people, adult carers or those who have experienced barriers to education gain new skills. Achieving SCQF Level 3 and 4 Adult Achievement Award Zoom training to help with socialisation Helping to use technology to allow people to engage in online learning Travel training Practical skills Level 5 CALA Volunteering opportunities Digital security

## **Supporting People and Connecting Communities – Moray**

Learners were referred to us so that they could gain an Adult Achievement Award and to build their confidence levels. This would allow them to go onto work placements and move into further education and/or work. They have all gained a lot of confidence and achieved their goals. Moray Pathways and Enable Works have been instrumental in providing referrals to us for support and for us to refer learners back to them for further support moving forward.

**Learner quote:** "I enjoyed learning with Lead and it helped me find out more about myself. It has helped me go on to do the boat building work placement. I would recommend Lead to others."

After completing an Adult Achievement Award, one of our learners said, "Thank you so much for being so patient with me and showing me how to get onto/use zoom."





# JP's Story



JP has undertaken a volunteer work placement at a local recycling centre while on the Aberdeenshire Employability Agreement.

JP has a community role at the centre repairing recycled bicycles to make them fit for the community to purchase them at a low-cost affordable price for families who could not afford much. When JP first started the work placement, he was shy and would not interact with people and would avoid sitting with them.

Over a three-to-six-month period the recycling centre helped JP increase his confidence by taking him out into the local community on the truck to pick up unwanted furniture and other recyclable plastic and aluminium materials which was upcycled and recycled by other young people with learning disabilities in the centre.

We saw a big change in JP with his confidence levels as we have learned from the recycling centre staff JP now coaches other learners and staff on how to repair the bicycles. JP has undertaken other duties of making up DIY packs of tables for the local community to use and has extended his working hours by asking the employer if he can stay so he can finish his work he enjoys doing.



The work JP has done with the recycling centre has increased and improved JP's chances of getting a paid job which he is now searching for. His mum picks him up weekly and is amazed at his confidence.

JP is delighted with his progress and has now seen the opportunities he has to move forward in his life, as when we first met him, he did not want to participate on the agreement due to fear and the feeling of rejection with a previous negative learning experience while at school. JP is happy feeling part of a team and is always now wanting to work with new people to share his new experiences of repairing bicycles with them.

The recycling centre have said they are absolutely delighted with JP's progress and glad their facilities and volunteering roles have helped him work towards employability. JP is now mixing well with others and is talking to them at tea breaks.

A month ago, JP met another learner of Lead Scotland's BB whom he worked with on the bicycles. They are now friendly with each other and are thinking of meeting outside of the centre for a friendly game of Badminton.





# Befriending



Our Befriending services are located in Fife, we have one for adults and one for young carers. The main aim of these services is to tackle isolation and loneliness with weekly activities or conversations. Our coordinators and volunteers have worked hard to keep the befriendeds engaged with the ever-changing covid guidance whether that be through the phone, online or even by email.

## **Annie's Story**

Annie, a young carer, was referred to Lead Scotland's Young Carers Befriending Project by Enable. Annie was matched to volunteer Lucy in March 2022. The befriending meetings were organised on a weekly basis on a Thursday at 10:30am for an hour and a half.

Annie has selective mutism and at the start of the befriending match, she did not have the confidence to go to the befriending meetings without her Mum and would not speak or engage with the volunteer.

Annie's volunteer showed such warmth and empathy to her, investing in weekly phone calls to prepare Annie for in-person meetings. Annie has a passion for animals and Lead Scotland paid for seven horse-riding lessons, in which the volunteer also attended. Through time, patience and encouragement, Annie's confidence has increased, and she became very engaged with the befriending meetings by attending on her own and happily talking with her befriender.



The volunteer persevered and Annie agreed to go on public transport to Waterstones bookstore as they both loved to read. Annie attended this meeting independently. The final befriending meeting was in September 2022 at Deep Sea World in South Queensferry. This was a final treat for Annie and Lucy to finalise the befriending meeting in a positive way and incorporated Annie's love of nature and learning.

Annie's attendance at school was poor prior to the befriending match and this has since improved. Annie now attends school in the morning. Since then, Annie has joined other groups in the Community and attends Nourish Support Centre in Kirkcaldy and goes to a Dungeons and Dragon group on Monday evenings. Lead's Fife Befriending Coordinator's, attended Nourish and spoke with Annie. Annie was friendly and spoke to us about the experience, how it has helped her to improve her confidence, connect with the community and she now wishes to attend school again.



## **Rose's Account:**

Rose, Annie's mum, has been a brilliant advocate for Lead Scotland's Young Carers Befriending Project and spoke with other parents, who had attended Nourish support centre, and said that she has seen a real difference in Annie's wellbeing and confidence and that she would recommend the service to other young carers.

# Peggy's Story



Peggy, 49, has mobility problems, experiences low mood which affected her mental wellbeing and was feeling increasingly lonely and isolated. Her anxiety impacted her confidence to go out and meet others and hoped that having a befriender call regularly would help with this. She also enquired about help with her dyslexia and literacy difficulties.

She was matched with Steven, who finds it relatively easy to strike up conversation over the phone.

Peggy said that she really enjoyed talking with Steven, “he talks a lot which helps generate conversation.” While she was enjoying the phone calls and was hopeful to eventually meet in person, her anxiety was impacting her confidence. Her physical health also declined and was awaiting an MRI to determine the cause of her back pain.

Peggy has lots of interests including knitting, arts, crafts, and animals. She was engaging with learning support and working towards entering a course at a community college for animal care. She helps run a hedgehog hospital, where she feeds and raises hedgehogs until they can be released back into the wild.



Due to limitations for attending a local group, she expressed an interest in joining one online so was sent a few options for knitting, mindfulness doodling and wildlife groups/courses.

She said "It sounds really corny, but it was the highlight of my week having someone to talk to. Because of my befriender I've now arranged for my mum to get befriending support through in West Lothian because she's really lonely." She also spoke about doing TikTok videos to raise awareness about hedgehogs "it's good getting comments and seeing people are interested and having more people to talk to." Peggy was also preparing for her next move, "I'm looking into going to Parkgate in Rosyth to do some community learning which will get me one step closer to doing an animal course at college."

### **Steven's account:**

When asked if Steven thought Peggy had felt less lonely and socially isolated, he said "Yes. I was someone regular to talk to, so she didn't feel so alone knowing I was always going to call on time."

"There was an increase in confidence. When I think about what it was like in the beginning and compare, I can see she became more open, talking about family, her likes and dislikes, would speak about her budgies. We built good communication by the end. It finished on a high. She seemed to be more outgoing by the end, but that comes down to building trust. In my opinion it ended on a positive."





# Volunteers



Our volunteers are cherished here at Lead, without them a lot of our services would not have the outreach that they do.

Whether they are a befriender helping us tackle loneliness in Fife or helping our learning coordinators teach people new skills.

## **An Interview with Vera**

Lead Scotland is very fortunate to have amazing and very dedicated volunteers.

We would like to introduce you to Vera, who has been volunteering with Lead Scotland for approximately 13 years of supporting learners. Vera has supported a variety of learners with various needs in learning and across a number of projects and Volunteer Managers.

Welcome Vera and thank you for agreeing to share your experience and work as a Lead Scotland Volunteer.

**I:** Could you tell us why you like to volunteer?

**V:** It gives me a sense of achievement and fulfills my sense of social responsibility, as well as filling the time gap since retiring from my job. I have learned new skills.



**I:** Can you tell us about some of the support you have provided to learners over the time you have been a Volunteer with Lead Scotland?

**V:** I have supported learners who have disabilities to complete courses; develop skills such as being able to travel independently on public transport through Travel Training, improve core skills; confidence building and time management; basic digital skills, and being a Volunteer befriender, are just some of what I have been involved with.

**I:** Sometimes there can be challenges in Volunteering and finding solutions to them involves problem solving skills. Can you described some of the challenges you have faced and overcome as a Volunteer?

**V:** Initially when starting to support a learner, it is building rapport and trust between us. When learning new skills, it takes time to build confidence in using those skills. This can involve learning new accessibility tools and programmes.

Especially since lockdown started, learning new digital skills and programmes has been challenging. As an example there was one situation was where I used a college website that wasn't very user friendly. The learner and I met on Zoom and both shared the screen of the website on Zoom. Switching between the various screens was a challenge. We finally got it sorted out, between the learner, Learning Coordinator and myself, but it was quite frustrating for a while. I could go to the Learning Coordinator for support with this and anything else I might need as a Volunteer.

At the end of a learner's support it can be difficult to say goodbye, especially if I have worked with them for a long time. It is nice though that they are enabled to go on to other support or do things more independently.

**I:** What would you like to say to others who may be considering becoming a Volunteer with Lead Scotland?

**V:** Lead Scotland is a great organisation to volunteer with. They match you with learners who need the skills you have, enabling you to share your skills and learn new ones.

I feel that services to disabled people in Moray are not as high profile as some other services, however, Lead Scotland is helping to fill that gap in learning support.

I would encourage those who are thinking of volunteering to ask about how they could share their skills. There are a variety of ways to do that.

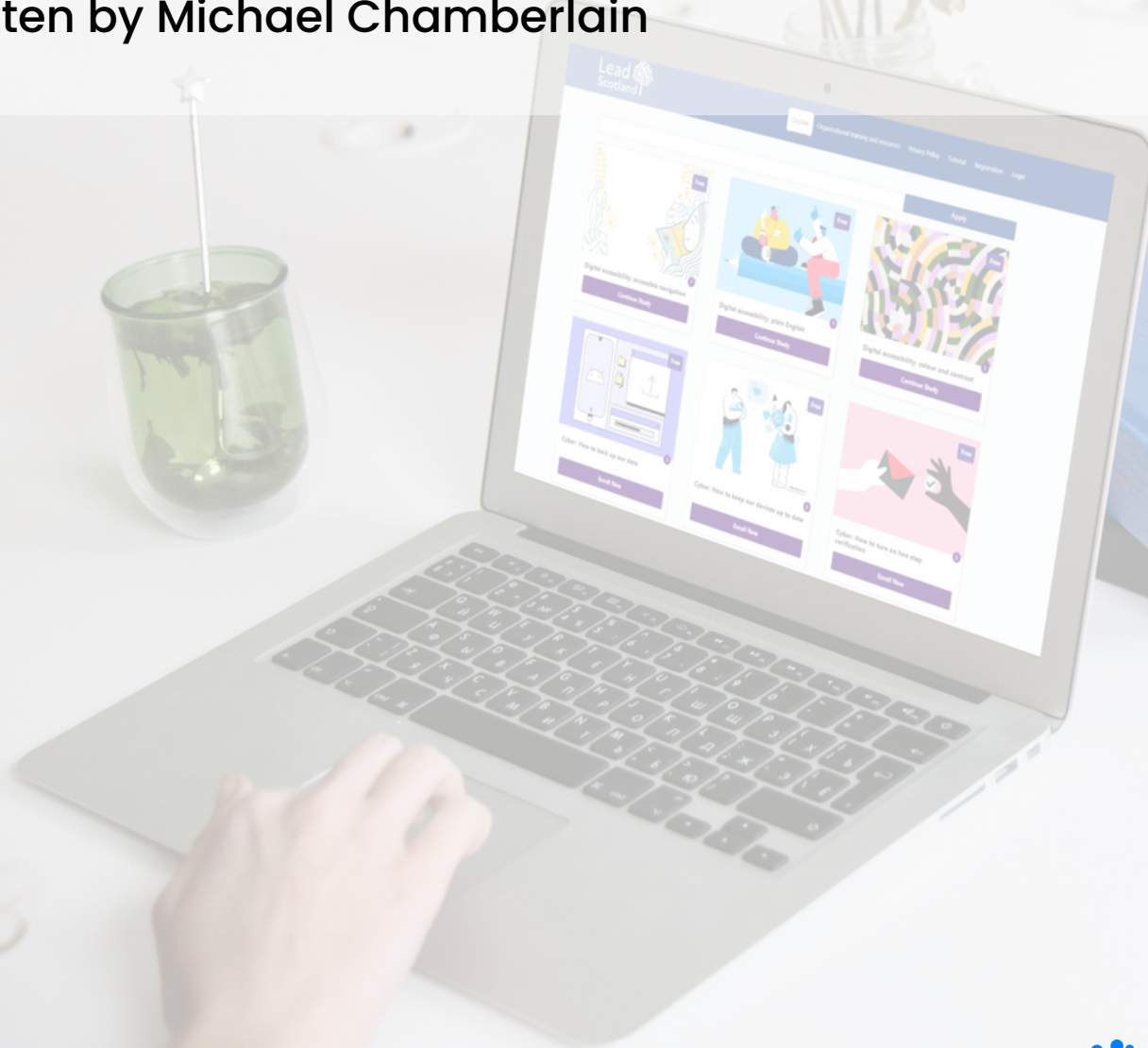
**I:** Thank you Vera for sharing your ideas and experience with us. Your support and dedication are valued and appreciated by us all.





# My Lead

Written by Michael Chamberlain



In the previous financial year we submitted an application to JP Morgan & Chase's Force for Good team, with the hope that we would be able to granted support in building our online learning platform, My Lead.

We were delighted when we got the news that we had been accepted as one of their charity partners and would be able to work with a dedicated team to help build our vision.

The learning solution was built with accessibility and sustainability at the forefront of their minds. The team provided the creative and technical support to allow the staff here at Lead Scotland to have the skills and knowledge to use and maintain the platform on our own.

For some of our learners this was the first time that they have taken a leap of faith to complete an online course. We will be supporting people one to one, in small groups and of course people can independently access this resource.



When people realise how flexible and accessible this type of learning is they will get a taste for this approach and in our experience, they will want to keep learning. There are so many online learning opportunities to keep exploring, the first course is the first step on a great journey and personal growth. Whether that be towards gaining more knowledge on a particular topic or by gaining an SQA through the platform.



A woman with pink hair and glasses is sitting at a desk, smiling while using a laptop. She is wearing a white t-shirt with a heart-shaped graphic. A joystick is visible on the desk in front of her. The background is a bright, out-of-focus office or classroom setting.

# Policy Work

Written by Rebecca Scarlett

During the past year we have provided evidence to the Education, Children & Young People Committee at the Scottish Parliament, on a proposed new bill related to transitions – the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill.

This bill is proposing imposing mandatory duties to prepare a Transitions plan for every disabled child and young person in Scotland. On the face of it, this sounds like a positive thing and something that could surely only help improve outcomes for young disabled people leaving school. However, we are concerned about the lack of detail in the bill, the practicalities of implementing it, the eligibility criteria to get a plan, the underestimated costs to deliver it (and the risk this poses to diverting funds away from cash strapped health and social care services) and the fact no amount of planning will address the woeful lack of appropriate services available for disabled young people to move onto after school. We're also not convinced adding new legislation on top of the existing very cluttered policy landscape already governing transitions, is going to make a real difference.

Secondly, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) have published a new report on Tackling Persistent Inequalities Together in further and higher education. Within the report a new set of National Equality Outcomes have been published. These represent the changes SFC are asking colleges and universities to work towards to make post school education fairer for disabled people and other groups. Lead Scotland was part of a working group tasked with developing these outcomes. We highlighted the persistent and longstanding challenges disabled students face to get the right adjustments and support. We're very pleased to see that the following outcome we developed has been set for the sector, "Disabled students report feeling satisfied with the overall support and reasonable adjustments received, including from teaching staff, while on their course."

This is a watershed moment for us, as we have been working with SFC for years now to try and influence the targets they set for colleges and universities in relation to disabled students.

This particular outcome reflects the evidence we repeatedly hear on our helpline from students telling us lecturers are not following their support plans.

And finally, the Scottish Government and Students Award Agency Scotland (SAAS) have published a new report on Disability Related Student Support. This report is long overdue, and actually the work for this began many years ago now. We were responsible for instigating the review in the first place. Emma will maybe remember me standing up in a meeting room at SFC offices, imploring senior civil servants to review the way financial support is delivered to disabled students, following failure to include scrutiny of this in their wider review of Student Financial Support back in 2017.

Lead Scotland were asked to be a key steering group member of this inquiry and helped to influence the design and direction of the review. We also worked hard to ensure disabled students were involved at every stage of the review, from testing the surveys and increasing its reach to students, to inviting them to take part in focus groups and quality assuring the recommendations made. The evidence gathered from the surveys was vital in strengthening arguments we have made about the need for change in different areas, and in fact was a key tool in convincing SFC to implement the National Equality Outcomes I mentioned above. In the surveys, a whopping 39% of 493 respondents said their lecturers did not make any reasonable adjustments for them or follow the support plans. One student said,

“I repeatedly approached tutors and student support and could not get the adjustments that I needed. I had no support plan that was created for me and my tutors were dismissive of my disability related difficulties.”

While SAAS accepted this particular topic was out with the remit of the review (as it was just looking at financial support), it has highlighted the need for change in this area.





# Our Guides

Written by Rebecca Scarlett

We were delighted to publish our latest factsheet earlier in the year on how to prepare for a needs assessment at college or university. This factsheet was co-produced with a group of four disabled students.

As with previous similar projects, this group were contracted to work with us for a fair rate of pay rather than being asked to give us their time for free. We are committed to prioritising working with and paying talented disabled people to create experience-led information and guidance. We are extremely thankful to the team for reflecting on their own time at college and university to help shape this important work.

This new factsheet is a vital addition to our suite of free online information guides. It provides disabled students with essential information, advice and resources on how to get the most out of an assessment of their education needs. It explains what a needs assessment is and what to expect, how to effectively prepare for one and how to speak up for yourself throughout the process.



We were pleased to be able to produce this new factsheet in a variety of alternative formats including Easy Read and British Sign Language as part of our ongoing commitment to ensuring our guides are inclusive and accessible to people with a range of impairments.




After many years in circulation, our Post School Learning Choices in Scotland guide was given a radical refresh for 2023.

We reflected on how and where people are accessing information and also considered if this guide was duplicating information from other well used sources. With this in mind, we updated the guide and reduced it from a whopping 99 pages to just 17 pages (the text only version)!

We also translated it into Easy Read for the first time, making it accessible to a wider range of people than previously. This is a fantastic guide giving an overview of what's available at a national level after school, from learning in the local community or at college to the various training options available if going down a more vocational route.





# Helpline



Our National Disabled Student Helpline and Information Service is open to disabled people who live in Scotland, their friends and family, and to people who care for, work with or support disabled people who live in Scotland.

We can help on a range of issues, from:

- Applying for educational courses and training programmes  
Information on community learning opportunities
- Sources of funding for disabled learners
- Support for disabled learners in a range of environments  
Support and funding for carers
- Information regarding disabled people's rights in post-school learning under the Equality Act
- Signposting to specialist sources of support and many other things

Over the past year this helpline has interacted with 141 people over 441 calls from 22 local authority areas.. These calls vary from accessing post school learning, benefits and funding to learn.

**Quote from a caller:**

“Rebecca has been very kind, helpful and informative. I'm grateful for the support I've been given, which has given me the confidence to pursue the issue with my university and work towards a resolution, which is still underway”.



# Look to the Future

As we have come to the end of our current strategic plan, our main focus will be the implementation of our new strategic plan, to find out more about it go to the About Us section on our website. We have met some of our targets, but looking to the future we hope to continue to grow and aim higher.

## **Our look to the future:**

- Embed the use of How Good is our community learning and development
- Continue building a team of assessors and internal verifiers to support our SQA centre.
- Map assistive technology providers and the services they offer to evidence the gap.
- Market my.lead.org.uk to staff and volunteers in other organisations.
- Build new partnerships which enable us to directly and indirectly offer disabled people and carers remote learning opportunities using my.lead.org.uk.
- Commission disabled people to lead sessions related to courses on my.lead.org.uk.
- Map the need for befriending in areas where we deliver learning.
- Create a clear link between learning and befriending in Fife.
- Convert the volunteer induction training into an online course available at my.lead.org.uk.
- Apply for funding to extend our specialist helpline beyond 10 hours per week.
- Commission disabled people to create/refresh information guides.
- Map the advocacy landscape in Scotland.
- Support disabled people to take part in policy or strategy consultation events in person and online.
- Evaluate our membership of strategic groups.

# Thank you to our Supporters

Principal funding sources in 2023-24 include our valued Local Authority partners in Aberdeenshire, Highland, Fife, Perth and Kinross, North Lanarkshire and Dundee via a range of diverse departments within Adult Literacy Partnerships, Community Planning Partnerships, Tenant Participation Project, Health and Social Care Partnerships and others.


We gratefully received restricted income from Dundee Carers, Bank of Scotland, Walter Craig, One Stop Community, Inchyre Trust, Meikle Foundation and the Tides Foundation to support projects.

Hugh and Mary Miller bequest  
Walter Craig  
One Stop Community  
Inchyre Trust  
Nimar  
Meikle Foundation  
Garfield Weston (received in 21-22)  
Meikle Foundation  
Bank of Scotland

Tides Foundation  
Scottish Government  
Aberdeenshire Council  
Highlife Highland  
Dundee Council  
North Lanarkshire Council  
Fife Council  
Perth Council  
Dundee Carers Centre



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