

Youth Arts Open Fund

Case studies



Interest Link Borders

Scottish Borders | £6,869



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Interest Link Borders

About us

Interest Link Borders is a charity supporting children, young people and adults with learning disabilities to connect with their communities, build friendships, develop confidence and access meaningful opportunities. The organisation works across the Scottish Borders through locally based branches, staff and peer-age volunteers, delivering both 1:1 and group activities.

Interest Link Borders' work is rooted in long-term co-production with members and families. The organisation recognises that people with learning disabilities often experience lifelong social exclusion, limited access to activities and reduced opportunities for independence. Its programmes aim to address these barriers by creating inclusive, supportive environments where members can develop skills, express themselves and feel a sense of belonging.

Our Project

The project involved two drama and dance productions delivered with children and young people with learning disabilities in Hawick and the wider Scottish Borders: The Jungle Book (Youth Drama & Dance group) and The Wizard of Oz, alongside a related dance film project, Neon Cowboys.



The Youth Drama & Dance group adapted The Jungle Book into a panto-style production, building on the group's previous drama experience. Fourteen young members with learning disabilities, supported by volunteers, worked with a professional director and dance tutor across structured rehearsal sessions before performing to family and friends at the Heart of Hawick Theatre in January 2025. Members chose roles on and off stage and worked in

small groups, supported to challenge themselves creatively while maintaining a strong sense of fun and teamwork.

Alongside this, the Children's Drama & Dance group delivered their first-ever drama production, *The Wizard of Oz*, between April and June 2025. Seven younger members with learning disabilities, supported by peer mentors and volunteers, explored characters, movement and storytelling through games and rehearsals before performing to an audience of family and friends at Burnfoot Community Hub. Activities were adapted to suit different confidence levels, with opportunities to perform individually or as part of a group.

Later in 2025, the group also took part in *Neon Cowboys*, a line-dancing film project. Members worked with a dance tutor to learn and rehearse choreography, adapting steps where needed and filming the final piece in both light and dark settings using glowstick costumes. The project offered a different creative challenge, combining dance, teamwork and performance for camera rather than a live audience.

"I feel more creative and have lots of fun."

"I felt involved and it felt easy to express my character."



Across all elements, the project was youth-led and inclusive. Members selected themes, developed stories and characters, chose how they wanted to participate, and were supported by peer mentors and staff to express their ideas. Individual journeys highlighted growing confidence and self-belief, from members speaking on stage for the first time to others taking on bold roles or supporting peers.

Barriers to participation in arts experiences

All members involved have learning disabilities, often alongside additional needs such as sensory impairment, epilepsy, mobility challenges or autism.

Many experience bullying, social isolation and limited friendship networks, particularly within a rural context where public transport is poor and accessible opportunities are scarce.

Most younger members are educated within additional needs units and have limited access to arts activities outside school. Post-school provision in the area has reduced significantly, further limiting opportunities for creative participation. Families often provide high levels of care, which can be isolating and affect carers' wellbeing.

The project responded to these barriers by delivering accessible, supportive arts activity in familiar community settings, with consistent staffing, peer support and flexible approaches to participation. Drama and dance offered structured yet playful ways for members to express themselves, build relationships and try new experiences in a safe environment.

Impact

The project supported 22 children and young people with learning disabilities.

All 22 reported the following outcomes:

- Feeling better connected to their peers and communities
- Feeling better able to express themselves through involvement in arts activities
- Improved mental health and wellbeing through participation in creative activity

Feedback from members, families and volunteers highlighted increased confidence, happiness and social connection. Parents and carers described seeing young people trying new things, expressing themselves creatively and developing friendships, with performances and filmed projects providing a strong sense of pride and achievement for everyone involved.

