

June 2018

Annual Review 41



#happiness



For children and adults with support needs and learning disabilities – and their carers

Acknowledgments

City of Edinburgh Council



Midlothian Council



West Lothian Council



East Lothian Council



Falkirk Council



Artlink



European Social Fund



Scottish Power Energy People



Children's Aid



Robertson Trust



The Short Breaks Fund



Garfield Weston Foundation



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Contact Details	Back Cover



Above: Robin Hamilton, Development Manager receiving the key to the Mini Bus. We thank Children's Aid for the kind donation of this Mini Bus. We are looking forward to using the bus to support people to get out and about in the community.



An overview: Where The Action Group works

Here we are today supporting 1432 people

Falkirk:
Real Jobs, CAATS and Advice
121 people using services



West Lothian:
HACSS and Advice
87 people using services



Midlothian:
CAATS and Advice
126 people using services



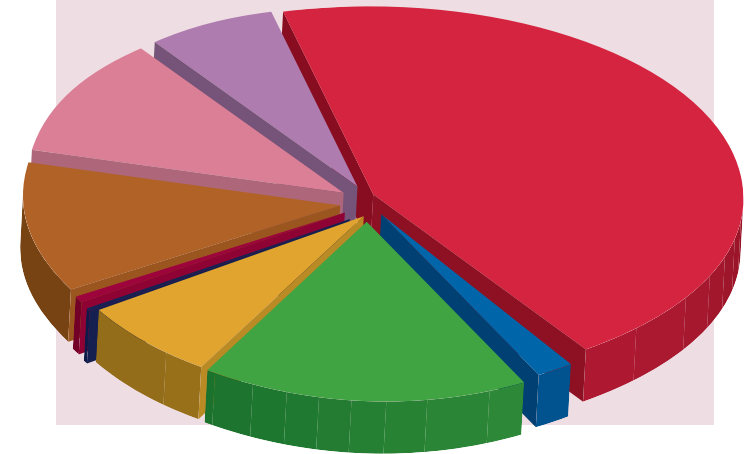
Edinburgh:
HACSS, CAATS, Advice and
Real Jobs
991 people using services

East Lothian:
CAATS and Advice
107 people using services



People's Support Needs 2018

- Learning disability
- ADHD
- Autism (ASD)
- Epilepsy
- Eating disorder
- Dementia
- Mental Health
- Physical disability
- Other



*Happiness
is beautiful*

OUR MISSION: To value, listen to and involve people so that our every action is judged to be the best.

Vice Chair's Report – Steven Oliver



'Happiness, happiness, the greatest gift that I possess.'

It is now 10 years since the onset of the financial crash of 2008 and it is sad to say that we are all still feeling the aftershocks. The words of this song may seem hollow when those with learning disabilities are still faced with growing council cuts, daycentre closures and lack of employment opportunities. This year The Action Group has faced often haphazard and illogical attempts by councils to save

money which has caused distress and anxiety to our service users and carers.

So why is 'Happiness' The Action Group's theme for 2018? Every parent wants the best for their children and for them to grow up and be happy. This is something we can all relate to and applies equally to those with support needs and learning disabilities. It is the key motive that resulted in the creation of The Action Group and drives us all on now.

I'm proud to report several successes born out of this positive approach to the challenges we faced, namely:

- Increase in services in Edinburgh, East Lothian and Falkirk
- Care Inspectorate Grades at 5 (very good) across all services
- Real Jobs Falkirk service renewed

- Investors in People – Gold standard awarded for second time
- Staff survey – over 90% of support workers would recommend The Action Group as a place to work
- Income rising to £12million +

These achievements have come through a positive and creative approach of our staff to overcome the barriers our service users face so that they can follow the life of their choice and experience their own 'happiness'. This should put a smile on everyone's face – even councillors! My thanks to all our staff for your hard work and commitment.

My thanks to Cynthia Anderson and Rose Gordon who have left the Board for your valuable contribution, and a warm welcome to Ian Hood who is returning after a number of years away.

Finally, I wish to thank Linda

Tuthill and her management team for their efforts and leading by example and the Board for their contribution. The Action Group is well placed for continued success to bring more 'happiness' to those that need our support.

Perhaps Ken Dodd had a point after all!

Stephen Oliver (Vice-Chair)



CEO's Report – Linda Tuthill



What does happiness have to do with us? I would argue: everything.

We were set up by parents unhappy with the lack of options for their relative with learning disabilities or other support needs. They wanted their relatives to experience no barriers to their personal happiness. For their own happiness, these parents needed their relatives to have a community-based life rich in opportunity, not one lived in an institution. From their

unhappiness with the lack of services came the push for better and the organisation you know today: where personal happiness, however each person we support defines this, is at our heart. In this annual review, you will hear from some of the people we support about what makes their life a happy one.

A focus on happiness is important, as it is easy to only see the bad things that are happening in our world. The social, political and economic context in which we exist means there is a lot to be unhappy about including Brexit, austerity, welfare reform, inequality, loneliness and poverty. All of this affects the people we support and those we employ. Sometimes we all feel sad and this is part of life.

However, there is also much to be happy about.

We are contributing to personal happiness, for those

we support, through services that are of good quality and make a difference to people's lives. The majority of our users tell us they are happy with our services. Most of our staff are positive about working for us. Our Care Inspectorate grades are "Very Good" (5) for all services. We will keep providing quality services and do this better where we can. We will also try to do things differently, where this will benefit those we support and those we employ. Therefore, in our Business Plan, we have an innovation workplan, ensuring we change, as we need to, by listening to what people want from us, especially younger people with support needs and their families, just as we listened to those parents and their children, 41 years ago.

I wish you happiness.

Linda Tuthill (CEO)

The Board

Bob Taylor (Chair)

Douglas F. Logan (Secretary & Vice-Chair)

Stephen Oliver (Vice-Chair)

Nigel Hicks (Treasurer)

John Lindsay

George Nuki

Wilf McLauchlan

Monica Hunter

Rose Gordon

Adel Traki

Gordon Eldrett

John Griffiths

Ian Hood

Sara Lurie

Ibtisam Abokhrais



News from The Have Your Say Group

It has been a busy year for the Have Your Say group. Here are the highlights of what we have been up to.

■ We have helped to make Easy Read policies for Volunteering, Complaints, Duty of Candour (Honesty) and Keeping Money Safe. We are now working on Easy Read information about The Housing Service and what Development Managers, Team Managers and Assistant Team Managers do.



■ We have split our big meeting into two smaller meetings with different agendas so that people can come to meetings that interest them and so we can do more. One of the meetings takes place earlier so that people with children can come.

■ We have been working hard to make minutes, agendas and information accessible to everyone and are now working on a Newsletter.

■ We have been involved in helping people to be more involved in the recruitment of

new staff and in training them and will be working with Senior Managers this year to improve communication.

■ We are starting to think about how we can reach people who do not come to the meetings and including people from all different parts of the Action Group.

We are always looking for new members so please get in touch if you would like to **Have Your Say**

**Sonya Bewsher and
The Have Your Say Group**

*Happiness is a
rush of
endorphins*

A Focus on Customer Care

Good customer service means helping our **customers** the best we can. At The Action Group our internal teams do this in a friendly manner. Our customers are our service users, staff and our external people. We want to do our best to ensure they are satisfied. **Good customer service** is always being positive and willing to assist our **customers** to the best of your ability. Our internal team take pride in improving their services and have been busy doing more this year.

What has been happening?

The Finance Team

have reviewed our payslips so staff can receive these in an electronic format now. This is more efficient with time and saves costly posting. Not to mention better for the environment. Feedback has been really positive.

The Human Resources Team

continue to support us with recruitment and are working towards reducing our turnover by 3%. 2018 has brought challenges of registration for our support Workers with the Scottish Social Services Council.



www.sssc.uk.com

We are encouraging all staff to register as soon as possible.

"Communication has improved greatly since the introduction of staff emails"
Support worker March 2018

"Work email is a big step forward"

Staff survey 2018

Our Admin Team

have been working hard to improve their services both as our 'front of house' and supporting internal teams with administration tasks. They are always happy to help. The team have been working closely with Paul McCrory our IT manager to improve communication with staff by setting up Action Group email accounts for each of our staff. From July 2018 this will be the main way we communicate with staff. So far staff have said the email addresses have made a huge improvement to the way we communicate with them.

**Keith Fricker and
Danny Hayward**

Help make someone happy

Did You know you could fund a holiday in our caravan from £225 per week. Get in touch with our Admin Team if you or your business would be interested in sponsoring a holiday for someone who might struggle to pay for it.



Paul King, on holiday at the Caravan

Our Admin team at Norton Park also manages the bookings and maintenance of our Action Group caravan located at Seton Sands Holiday Village; which is available to be booked for holidays for our members and service users of The Action Group.

Children and Adults in Transition Services (CAATS)

Moving In, Moving On

Leaving home for the first time can be hard. The Action Group supports people through all of life and part of that can be moving into your own home.

In our CAATS service we have worked with lots of young people and their families through this important stage of life. We base our approach on paying careful attention to the needs and wishes of the young person, and also use the 'Principles of Good Transitions' guidance from the Scottish Government. Two of our services users, Calum and Scott, have helped us come up with a list of 'Top Tips' for families to think about when a young person is planning to move on.

TIPS

1. Get to know the support team well.
2. Make sure there is clear plan for the big day.
3. Set regular review meetings with the managers for the first months so any issues can be sorted quickly.
4. Have a plan for the first few weeks with familiar activities in place.
5. Have a clear expectation of budget for activities and food shopping.
6. Make sure the team know all the young person's likes and dislikes.
7. Plan when you are going to visit for the first time and the communication you would like from the staff or your child.
8. Understand that there will be things which you might not be happy with but get to know who you can raise these concerns with quickly.
9. Worrying is normal but it's ok to start enjoying time again without your child.

"The Action Group supported Scott prior to him moving in, ensuring we were happy with the accommodation, explained each step of the process, always involving Scott and listening to him. Because of this support Scott was not apprehensive on the day he moved and he has not looked back"

Linda, Scott's Mum

"When Calum moved into his own home it was an emotional story warts and all. We can now assume and are confident Calum is happy and have no doubt he likes living there. The Final Question was and is would we do it again? Yes without a doubt and happily with The Action Group"

**Gerry and Joyce,
Calum's Parents**



This is the Callum and his house mates enjoying the sunshine

Dan is supported by our Midlothian Team and he wanted to share his thanks to the team and how living on his own made him happy, also helping his parents.

Hi Everyone.
It's Dan here. I have asked Robin to write this message to you all. I just wanted to say a big THANKYOU to everyone who has supported me. This has really helped me to live on my own but has also helped my mum and dad with support workers now supporting me with things so mum and dad don't need to. You are all good staff that give me good support. It is really good that I have my own home. I am really, really happy at this moment. I have really good managers in Angie and Lisa and they do a lot for me. I want to give you all a Big WOW!
Cheers, Dan.



Housing and Community Support Services (HACCS)

Bradley's Story

Hello there. My name is Bradley, but you can call me Brad. I've had quite a journey in life, in fact, I've had a hard life. But now, I'm feeling that I've finally "come out the other side".

After a difficult time in my old flat, to be honest I don't know what I would have done without the help from Team 1.11. The Action Group were able to offer me a new flat. I'm so grateful. It's a new area and a completely fresh start for

me. I'm really liking it.

I'm not one for going out much, however, I've managed along to the Team 1.11 Pool and Karaoke Groups and discovered I quite enjoy it.

I support Hearts and West Ham and there've been some good results recently – long may it continue as this makes me very happy indeed.

So, happiness to me is my new home, good support from people who care and meeting new people at the groups.



Brandon

Brandon's Story

Hi, I am Brandon. I have recently signed a lease for my first ever flat.

I have been able to choose many new things for my flat and I am especially pleased with my new 55 inch TV and PlayStation. I am a really good gamer and enjoy beating my support workers. That makes me very happy!!

I am really looking forward to using the kitchen for cooking, as I enjoy this. I have also chosen a bright red couch: again a colour that makes me happy.

Making plans for the future is very exciting and I am

feeling very happy about how my life is looking now I am in my new home.

Susan's Story

Hi, my name is Susan. I wanted to let you know about the wonderful weekend I recently had at Stobo Castle. My support worker Anna made this possible for me and helped me book. All the staff at Stobo were fantastic and helped make sure I had access to all the facilities there.

Being away gave me time to relax. I enjoyed swimming, massage and enjoyed some of the nicest food I have ever had. I felt so happy and relaxed.

It was the best holiday I have ever been on!



Susan

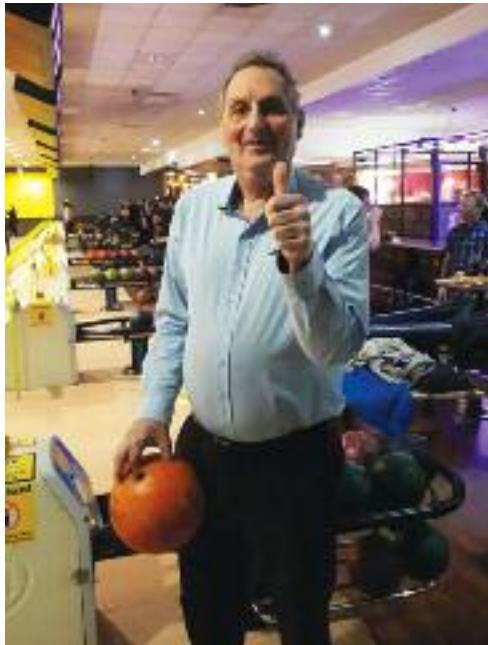


Bradley with friends (back row right)

The Spotlight on Muirhouse Green

What Happiness means to the gentlemen who live at Muirhouse Green.

Muirhouse Green is home to four gentlemen, Dan, Tommy, Alistair and Fred, who are supported by a staff team from The Action Group. The house can often be busy and everyone works together to make sure the environment suits everyone. Muirhouse Green is a



Fred Preparing to bowl a winning score



Graham, on the left with Alistair (seated). Fred (seated), Dan (standing)

house full of laughter and fun.

Someone who brings fun into the house is Graham. Graham is the member of staff who supports the men with their house hold tasks. Everyone lights up when he arrives and the four men love getting involved in helping keep their home clean and tidy.

The men who live there, together with their staff, have been busy improving their home by redecorating and making a sensory space for relaxing. There are also big plans for improving the garden in the summer. This will all add

to a happy home for everyone.

Dan has been helping his team to develop their Makaton Sign Language, teaching his staff and housemates some of the signs he likes to use. Having this improved shared communication between Dan and staff is opening up choices and new experiences for Dan and helping him be more able to express himself.



It's cheers from Dan

All of the men are active members of their community and love getting out and about, doing the things they like to do. Recently everyone decided to have a night out bowling and they beat the staff, which was another happy moment.

Lisa Williamson and The Muirhouse Green Team

Happiness is feeling part of something



Fred and Alister making pizza

Advice Matters

Happiness and money: how Advice Services can help

It is hard to be happy when you don't have enough money to live off or help when you get into financial difficulty.

Especially with a benefits system that can be complex and heartless. When you have a support need, this can be even more difficult. The strain on your mental health and all parts of your life can be overwhelming. This is why our

expert Advice Service is vital for many people, such as John:

"I had been in debt for a long time. I couldn't pay all my bills. I had debt on my gas meter

so couldn't turn on my heating. I didn't want to deal with the debts - I wanted them to go away. I binned all the letters

and didn't tell anyone about it.

I only asked for help when I got a letter from the court about my rent arrears. I felt so stressed about this. I brought this letter into Penny, my Benefits Adviser. She organised a meeting with Lyndsey - a Money Adviser at The Action Group. Things got better after that: They made sure I had someone to represent me in court. Lyndsey contacted Changeworks, where Cerri got a new payment meter installed and applied for a grant towards my gas debt too. It was successful! My gas debt is cleared and I have credit on my account too!

Penny has helped me with changes to my benefits and a claim for Employment and Support Allowance. Lyndsey is supporting me with my other debts and we have a plan that



will these manageable.

I don't know what I would have done without this help. I wouldn't be here, as I was so stressed and unhappy. That pressure is now

gone. Penny and Lyndsey also helped me explain my money problems to my partner. Now we can talk about money worries - we're a team! If you have money problems, my advice would be, **Speak to The Action Group Advice Team - you will feel better.**"

Funding for our service is always a challenge. This year is no different and our Money

"Could not have been given any better help and support from start to finish, and knowing that there is help makes so much difference whatever the outcome."

"I'm not very good at speaking up for myself and would have ended up giving in. I know that I can come here from now on for help."

"Customer Service is something I feel I know about working in sales/management myself. Seldom have I met someone as efficient and helpful."

"I no longer have to worry that I've not got enough money to live on"

Advice service funding has ended. However, we have new Scottish Power Energy People Trust funding to provide benefits and affordable warmth advice and support, to families of younger disabled children.

We are always open to any donations or fundraising ideas to allow us to raise vital money to help people with their debt and welfare benefits. Get in touch at:

advice@actiongroup.org.uk

Jo Kirby



The Art of Happiness

We are lucky to have so many talented people we support, who are part of The Action Group. We asked some of them to share with us how they use art to express what makes them happy or unhappy.



Sean taking photos at the AGM, 2017

Sean Grubb (Real Jobs)

Sean is an extremely talented photographer who shares his work on social media and was part of our photography team at our AGM and Conference.

“Being able to take photos at the conference really made me feel even more a part of The Action Group and I felt happy to be helpful” Sean

Sean’s photographs are featured on the front cover of this annual review.



On the deck by Ewan Blaikie



Caribbean on the forth by Ewan Blaikie

Ewan Blaikie (Real Jobs)

Ewan describes how being a photographer, helps to add to his happiness.

“Taking photos distracts me from the pressures in the world. It is quite calming and it takes me into my own bubble. It is nice that people can visit my bubble and can see what I see.

I don’t just photograph ships. I love water, maybe because my Grandad was in the navy and I often think about this in quiet times.”

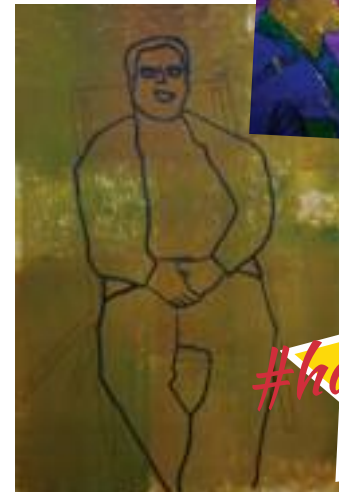
Neil Grassie (TEAM 1.1)

The Action Group has supported Neil for many years. You could say he has grown up with us and we have grown up with him. He is one of our Artists in residence!

“Most of my pictures are of people. I chose pictures from



For the Love of Football, 2017



At the beach self-portrait, 2017

#happiness

magazines or family photos and trace them. I paint the back ground first, then add bold lines with pen and paint in between the lines with strong colours. Art helps me to relax. It makes me happy that people are so positive about the work I do.”

Monica Hunter (TEAM 1.8 and Board Member)

Monica has been at the heart of The Action Group for many years. She is a powerful self-advocate who also fights for the rights of other people with learning disabilities. She uses this passion as a Director on the Board of The Action Group. Monica’s poem about what happiness is for her:

What makes me happy?

*Looking out the window,
feeling the sun.*

Smoking

*My support to help me get
out and about.*

Vodka and Irn Bru

And a latte.

Working at The Action Group and Our Happiness



What do others do that makes you happy?

(Helen Walton, Senior Manager)

Thoughtful acts make me happy – people taking time and care and attention. People who appreciate my quirky and often weird sense of humour and accept me as I am.



Can you describe what being happy feels like?

(Greg Stark, Employment Advisor, Real Jobs)

Happiness is a subjective experience that varies from person to person. I feel happy spending time with my family and friends, watching my favourite sports or seeing others I work with succeed. As long as I keep smiling I am experiencing happiness.



What do you do to make others feel happy?

(Kat McClory, Support Worker)

I try to be positive and make people laugh. Being considerate and listening is important too.



What makes you feel happy when you are at work?

(Cameron Robb, Support Worker)

I am happiest in my job when it noticeably makes a difference to a service user's life.



What is your happiest memory from the past year?

(Ciara Felle, Support Worker)

Starting a postgraduate course in occupational therapy and moving to Scotland.

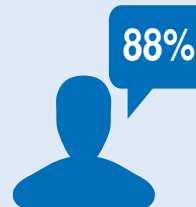


What has The Action Group done to help with your Happiness?

(Angie Bain, Team Manager)

I have been given confidence to do my job well and have always been encouraged to try new things. I have been given some great opportunities within my role for example setting up and coordinating groups. I am so Grateful for the opportunities. I have loved every moment.

Highlights from our Staff Survey 2018



88%

88% of staff are happy with their work life balance.

"My Manager supports me well through stressful times"

"I have friends at work, we are not just colleagues"

We are working hard on improving everyone at The Action Group's Health and Wellbeing. Read more about this on page 14.

#happiness



94% of staff feel valued in their place of work.

"It is a great company and it gives me a purpose in life"

"I love my job. I feel valued in my team; we are a great team and support each other"

We are working hard to improve pay and softer benefits for staff.



89% of staff are content with the communication they receive from The Action Group.

"Communication is of a good standard"

"I prefer the new method of communication with work emails"

We are working on our communication strategy and policy to improve the consistency and quality of all our communication. We will share this with you soon.

Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow!!! Beast from the East – NIL Action Group – WON!



At a time when being warm and cosy at home seemed like a sensible idea, Action Group staff were braving the freezing temperatures to keep delivering support to our service users.

Staff went above and



beyond to keep essential services running. Long walks through snow, driving colleagues to and from work, doing extra hours and sleepovers. Staying on with people until other colleagues could get there, as well as offering each other places to

stay so they could be safe and get to work. Neighbours and community members drove staff to work in 4 X 4 vehicles to reach service users in rural locations.

All of this showed incredible community spirit in action!

The powers of social media via the Staff Facebook page came into its own and was abuzz with helpful information for staff to keep them safe, to share with people, including offers of lifts and other support. There was also the sharing of the fun parts of the snow, with service users and staff building snowmen; making

snow angels and having snowball fights (safe ones of course!!)

The commitment from our staff was impressive and showed the dedication of people who care and see what we do as, more than just a job. It is a vocation and these extra efforts illustrated this in so many ways.

Thank you to everyone for going that extra mile. (Even when the mile was packed with snow!)

By Danny Hayward



Fun in Falkirk

Another year has quickly passed and Falkirk housing support continues to grow.

At The Action Group we want to help people to lead an independent and inclusive life, the way they want to.



June, worked with him to find the right opportunities for him. Jordan now has two volunteering positions. He is a valued team member at the Forces Support shop in the Howgate shopping centre, where he helps to sort clothing and bric-a-brac, but his favourite job is helping customers. Michael the store manager said "Jordan is keen to help. He likes to make sure he and everyone else is doing a good job. He keeps me on my toes".

Jordan also volunteers at Muiravonside Newparks Farm, he has a number of jobs at the farm which improves his well-being and increases his independence. Jordan's dad said he sees "a change in

Jordan since being supported by The Action Group, he was getting support in a group setting but one to one is much better for him".

Tom's Story

Tom started his employment journey with a work placement at the Inchyra Hotel during his 6th year at Carrongrange school. With ongoing support from the Real Jobs Falkirk team he went on to attend the Workstart course at Forth Valley College.

Being a bit of an animal lover, his next placement was at Puppylove Dog Grooming Parlour in Linlithgow, which he loved.

He also volunteered in the Debra Charity Shop and the Re-Union Canal Project in Falkirk. This helped him to realise he enjoyed being outdoors and doing manual work. So, with the team's support, he got a job as a Recycling Operative, with ALS Management Services,

and has been employed full time in the Recycling Plant in Wishaw since February 2018.

Tom works day shifts and also night shifts which he prefers! He also intends to work towards passing his forklift test.



Tom and his family recently had a weekend away in a caravan – it was Tom's treat to them out of his new wages!!

Tom's mum says he has 'come on great and appreciates all the help he has received'. He and his family are really proud of what he has achieved and hope his success will inspire others to achieve their goals too.

Linda Matthews,
Development Manager

Aaron's story:

Aaron loves animals so volunteering at Muiravonside Newparks Farm wasn't a hard choice for him. His favourite job is working with the donkeys. Aaron's parents said "Thursdays are his favourite day of the week; he even looks out his clothes the night before".

Jordan's story:

Jordan wanted to use his support to volunteer in his community. His support worker,

Action on Stress

*I am not always happy
but my support can help*

Stress: reducing stress and being happier!

We are proud to have retained our Gold Investors in People Award this year, showing how much we value our staff. This time we also gained the Investors in People Health and Wellbeing Award, which evidences how much we do to support our staff in these areas. We have plans to do even more, as happier and healthier staff, leads to an even better quality of service for our users.

We have also been focusing on stress, as part of these further improvements for how we support our staff.

Stress in Social Care

Stress accounts for most days lost to sickness absence in the social care sector. Also, people who are stressed are five times more likely to have an accident at work. So, Stress is a health and safety issue. If social care was resourced properly and our

workers pay and conditions of employment were recognised in a similar way to Public pay issues, stress could be decreased. However, this may take a while if it ever happens at all. So in the meantime, we will have a focus on stress, to see what else we can do to help our staff.

Employment is the most significant protective factor for wellbeing, so if we can provide supportive conditions in teams, ensuring people have access to learning tools and assistance at the right times, this can go a long way to keep people functioning well in their work roles.

We encourage you to tell us if you are experiencing stress, either in your work or personal life.

We are going to be promoting improvement on stress throughout the rest of the year.



The Art Group, working on expressing Happiness through Art

For the people we support, stress gets in the way of happiness too.

Many users of our services are also affected by stress. We have regular social groups which have a focus on tackling isolation and aim to encourage our service users to maintain healthy lifestyles. Our cooking group promotes healthy eating, while our gardening group is a peaceful environment where as well as learning gardening skills, there is time to relax and find some peace of mind.

We also train staff in mental health so they have the skills and knowledge to support service users in this area.

One of our service users

explained the benefits of his support and how attending the groups has made a difference to him.

Support has given him the peace of mind he has been searching for, for many years. He has been attending a variety of groups, which he has enjoyed. The groups have meant he has met other people and feels included. The art group gave him an opportunity to do something he hadn't done in years. He was delighted with how well his artwork turned out.

Our group activities are also providing opportunities to make friends and have fun.

Liz Taylor and Mel Caplan

BEMAS: Whoever you are, wherever you come from, your happiness counts

BEMAS is funded by the City of Edinburgh Council and provides advice and support to families from black and ethnic minority communities, who have a child with additional support needs.

We provide 1:1 advice and assistance connecting carers with each other, with services that can help them and with their local communities. This reduces isolation and improves wellbeing.

The families we advise can face additional barriers to accessing the resources and services they need. They may find it difficult to understand information provided in English



and lack support networks in their local area. Families who have arrived in Edinburgh from other countries can find the systems of health, education and social services very different to those they are used to and difficult to negotiate. This is where we come in, as Kareena's story shows.

Kareena's story: (names changed for anonymity) BEMAS has led to many beneficial changes for Kareena and her family.

Kareena moved to Edinburgh from England in 2016. Previously she lived in the Middle East. She is a single mum with four children. Two of

her children have a support need: Nazif has Autism and Nayla has Epilepsy.

Life is very busy and challenging for Kareena: Finances, isolation from her local community, tiredness and finding affordable activities for her children were all areas where she needed help. BEMAS supported Kareena in all these areas by:

- **Connecting** Kareena to other agencies that could support the well-being of her and her family. For example, we assisted with a referral to Vocal – Better Breaks, for some respite services. This meant Nazif could attend swimming lessons with a support worker, which he really enjoyed, whilst Kareena could spend more time with her other children.

- **Supporting** Kareena to complete a Family Fund application to buy educational equipment for her children.

- **Assisting** Kareena to apply

for a Blue Badge to alleviate some of the stress of parking when she takes her children out.

- **Providing** childcare for her youngest child so Kareena can attend our carers group, where she is an active contributor and finds it very beneficial to be with other carers who understand the challenges she faces.

Kareena has now referred another three families to us, because she knows we can help them as much as we helped her.

Ola Bielak and Jo Kirby

"Although I have been in Scotland for 10 years now I still find it difficult to deal with my problems on my own. I feel sometimes a little bit lost in this country, it's so much different to my own country. BEMAS advisers helped me to understand what my rights are and what help is available for me and my son, they referred me to different services that were of great value to me" - Carer interview



Real Jobs in Edinburgh

New Jobs!



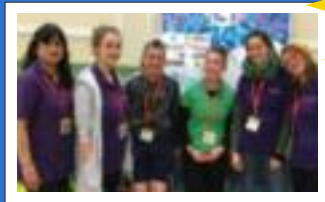
EWAN BLAIKIE began his job last summer, as a magazine distributor. He really enjoys it, though it was less fun in the winter!



ALAN MASTERTON worked alongside Ewan as a magazine distributor. Alan already works in Scotmid so was looking for additional income. He also really enjoyed it! Alan also got married last year, congratulations!

ROBERT STEIN has been working in Sainsbury's since November 2017 as a Customer Service Assistant and he's enjoying it very much!

ROBBIE ANDERSON secured his first job last year at Skool is Out! Robbie absolutely loves working with the children, and they think Robbie is 'awesome'.



"Real Jobs has given both us as a company, and Robbie, good support and has always been there to support Robbie and to assist us in his training."
Linda, Skool is Out

ANDREW CRICHTON was travelling to the airport to his job for 7 years, until he got himself a new job as a Kitchen porter at The Village Hotel closer to his house.



"Real Jobs is a genuine example of what good employability programmes should look like. The person-centered approach and ethos runs through the whole process. The advisors are committed to the best possible outcomes for the individual and that shows by their on-going support after employment. They truly understand that sustainability of employment is key. A great example of best practice in employability." Nina Rogers, Community Justice Scotland

We supported **41** people into new jobs last year!

2017-2018 Real Jobs supported a total of 193 people to access employment opportunities.



Friends of Real Jobs

The group, made up of service users and staff, hold monthly meetings to discuss what's happening in the service.

Sometimes, we have social nights! All Real Jobs service users are welcome to attend!

Training & Qualifications

Some of our Employment Advisors trained this year to deliver Disability Equality Training to employers. So far, they have already run the session for over 20 employers!



7 of our Employment Advisors passed their Personal Development Award in Supported Employment this year, becoming fully qualified!



by Lisa Williamson

Wonderful West Lothian



Healthy Living Group

Our Healthy Living Group is split into two parts and is in place to promote healthy lifestyles. One half of the group consists of meal prep and enhancing our cooking skills. Being service user led, the members plan the coming weeks and delegate jobs. The other half of the group focuses on promoting other areas of health – physical fitness, emotional wellbeing and mental health. This means each week is different. Sometimes we do an activity, host special guests or venture out – whatever we vote on. Recently we had staff members undergo training to

allow us to go on an adapted bike ride! This was some of our members' (and staff's!) first time on a bike which was exciting!

Happiness is...

As the theme for this year's Connect event was **#Happiness**, the Healthy Living Group wanted in on the action – each member worked



together to showcase what happiness means to them by creating a beautifully collaged collection of what makes them smile, including animals, holidays, colours and cake.

The group worked really hard on the project with a great end product to be revealed at The Art of Happiness exhibition.

I think they are proud of their work, don't you?

Events Committee

Every month, our Events Committee meets to discuss and organise our West Lothian social events. The Committee is responsible for the planning of our annual barge trips, bowling nights and BBQ and the organising of anything else that takes our fancy. We recently held our first bowling night of the year and it was as fun as ever. A bite to eat, a gang of pals and a bit of competition. What more could we want?

Jade Jenks

Making someone smile makes me happy



Evaluation Highlights

Thanks to everyone who has completed Service Evaluations for us this year. Your opinions really matter and help us improve. We know we do not always get it right so we appreciate hearing from you what has not gone well. However in 2018 the overall satisfaction levels in our services were high.

For more details about your Service Evaluations and our action plans please ask your manager for more detail or for a copy of your service evaluation feedback leaflet.



REAL JOBS: 98% of service users were happy and very happy



CAATS: 87% of service users were happy and very happy



ADVICE: 100% of service users were happy and very happy



HACSS: 90% of service users were happy and very happy

Care Inspectorate

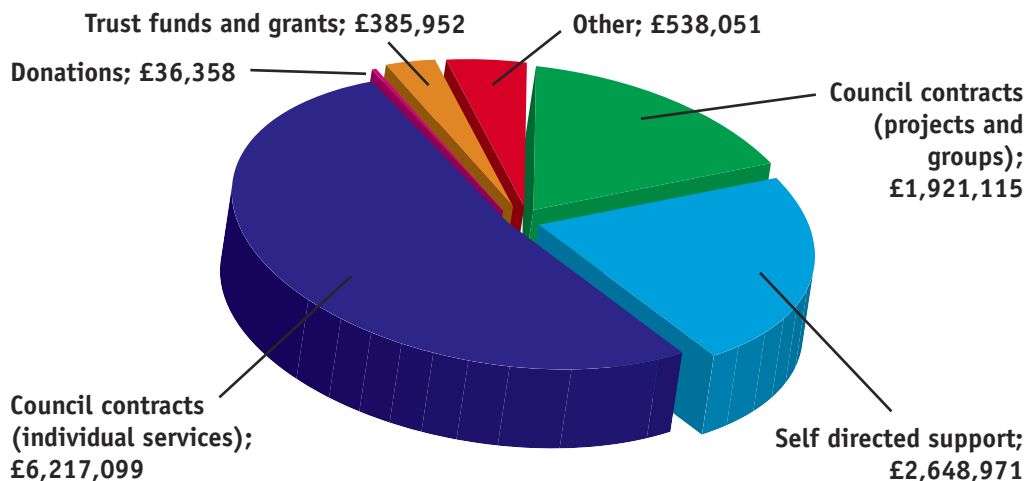
Our HACSS and CAATS Service have maintained our standard of 5 – VERY GOOD

You can read the detailed report online at www.careinspectorate.com

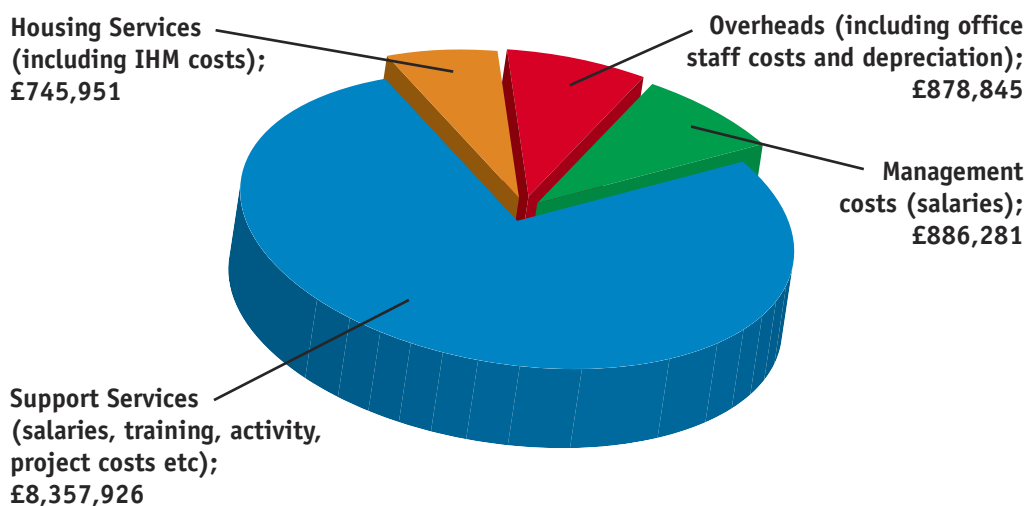


Finance

INCOME (Total: £11,747,546)



EXPENDITURE (Total: £10,869,03)



Quality

The two charts show a summary of our income and expenditure for the audited accounts, year ending March 2017. A point to note is that the sale of our property at Greenbank Grove took place in the year resulting in a surplus of £428,582, included under "other" on the income chart.

Our projected total income for the year 2017-2018 is estimated to be £12.4 million.

If you require any further information, please get in touch with our finance team at the Edinburgh Office.

This year there have been five formal complaints, one of which was not upheld. Three of these were about our quality of care and support and two were allegations of staff misconduct. Our Quality Team investigated each complaint, producing an action plan to ensure lessons were learned and improvements made across the organisation as a whole.

We also apologised for where our service fell below the high standards we would expect.

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Number of compliments	94	84	42	53
Number of concerns (informal/Stage 1 complaints)	42	28	24	29
Complaints to Care Inspectorate	2	1	3	0
Total number of formal/stage 2 complaints	6	9	10	5
Average time to conclude complaints (days) – internal only	19	21	24	31*

*2 were during the Christmas period and caused delay

A Focus on Autism and Building Success



Steph's Story:

My name is Steph and I want to tell you about my life and how I have become happier now I

am part of The Action Group. I used to get support from another organisation and they did not let me come to their office and I also nearly lost my flat. I am Autistic so sometimes I get really frustrated when I cannot understand. I really like my team and also the managers, Tracey and Linda who take time to understand me.

I come to the office every day as I live near. It helps me to organise my day and usually I have a really good day because I get to see people at the office who I can chat to and then I can plan my support. This helps keep me calm.

I feel my life is much better

and I am happier now.

Although it is not perfect, as sometimes I am still lonely.

Although I feel really close to my staff and I get involved in lots of the groups that The Action Group has. I also love buying bags and going to second hand shops. I have a great eye for a bargain.

The staff make me feel part of things and I feel that I always get a welcome from many of the people who work at the office. I feel like I know them and they know me. This makes me feel happier about life.

Colin's Collection

The Midlothian CAATS Team have been working with twin brothers Colin and Danny both of whom are autistic. The team were fortunate to get some funding which allowed us to do some joint working with colleagues from ARKLINK to look at the world through

Colin's eyes to improve communication and interaction through sensory activities he enjoys. Action Group staff and Artlink together with Colin produced a book, which is called **COLIN'S COLLECTION**



The idea behind the book is to support people who work with Colin to understand his sensory communication needs and for staff to be able to communicate consistently while having fun through engaging in activities. Many people on the autism spectrum have difficulty processing everyday sensory information. Any of the senses may be over- or under-sensitive, or both, at different times.

"We wanted to find an activity which appealed to Colin that could be developed by anyone working with him" said his Artlink worker.

The success of this book was

also talked about at the recent Scottish Government Conference "Positive about Autism" during one of the Keynote speeches by Artlink.

We were proud to see the work done by Colin and his team on the Big Screen.



Colin Playing music in a Session with Artlink



Danny, Colin's brother also got in on the music action during the project with Arklink.

Paws for Thought

★ ★ ★ ★
*Calling Autism
Champions*

**INCREASE YOUR
KNOWLEDGE**

Promote Best Autism
Practice at
The Action Group

Support and inspire
your colleagues

Support with Autism
Accreditation to gain
and maintain awards

INTERESTED?

**Email: [Elizabethtaylor@
actiongroup.org.uk](mailto:Elizabethtaylor@actiongroup.org.uk)**

**in our Learning and
Development team**

Catification: Meet Socks and Tibby

Did you know Florence Nightingale first recommended the use of pets as therapy as part of caring for people? Humans and animals can have a strong bond. Pets can help people feel less stressed and can add to a feeling of happiness. This is certainly true for the cats who live at Muirhouse Green and Bryce Avenue...



Meet Socks who lives at Muirhouse Green. (In fact he thinks he owns the place!) He loves the hustle and bustle of the house and all of the love and attention from everyone who lives there, as well as their support staff.

It's hard work being an Action Group cat, but someone's got to do it.



The beautiful Tibby lives at Bryce Avenue and is very much part of the house. Pat who also lives there enjoys looking after her, never forgetting to feed her and reminding the staff of anything she thinks Tibby needs. All the service users love Tibby and she sits with them in the evening watching TV and getting plenty of cuddles.

Since writing these articles, we are very sad to announce that Tommy McGlynn, who lived

at Muirhouse Green for many years, passed away at the end of April this year. He was one of the original members of the house when it was first set up and he will be greatly missed. In recent years he was a brilliant example of living life to the full, enjoying new experiences, holidays and many a pint of Guinness! We will all have very many happy memories of him.



Socks and Tommy at home in Muirhouse Green

...and Finally



We thought we would leave you with the words from John Booker's Rap which he performed at the AGM.

*You're going to hear my voice
I'm gonna shout it out loud
It's my life*

*It's now or never; I wanna be
involved and I'm coming at
you The Action Group crew...
I want to be listened to and
respected in all I do, I'll give
you all the clues*

*Jonny Booker says – do it my
way, don't save it for a rainy
day.*

*It's my life
I'm gonna train my staff to*

*help me take the risks; I want
to live while am alive so let
me thrive.*

*I will stand my ground and
write the rules, to make the
rules cool I'm gonna need you
around.*

*Jonny Booker says get
involved, don't back down.*

*It's my life
I'm not just a face in the
crowd. When it's not done
right your gonna hear my
voice aloud. I will shout it*

*proud to the crowd,
It's my life and I need to be
allowed.*

*Luck ain't enough I have got a
vision about decisions; make
no mistake it's my life.*

*I wanna be at the heart of all
my plans, and them plans in
my hands*

*Jonny Booker says yup, be
involved, stand up... be heard
and I am gonna keep my word*

It's your life...



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