
THE RIDGE
SOCIAL IMPACT REPORT
2022-2023

03





THE RIDGE

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UNLOCK OUR FULL POTENTIAL

If you value diversity and biodiversity, if you want you and your family to live in a flourishing community where people have access to training and fair employment, and healthy locally grown food please support us by becoming a member today.



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THE RIDGE SCIO
MESSAGE FROM
THE CHAIR

Bob Fyffe



Welcome to our latest Social Impact Report!

We have prepared this Social Impact Report as a way of capturing and communicating The Ridge's work over the past year; its impact on people's lives and on the place where we live and work.

Once again, it is worth restating that the primary charitable purposes of the Ridge are:

- Provision of locally accessible support and training to disadvantaged people
- Support and empowerment for those struggling to access important life skills
- Restoration of derelict or dilapidated land and buildings to benefit the community

2022-2023 saw the ongoing impacts of the Covid pandemic compounded by a cost-of-living crisis which shows no signs of abating. It has been a period of sustained challenge for individuals and for our community. This report demonstrates the ways in which The Ridge has provided vital support locally, at a time of increased need, and when statutory and other third sector supports have been increasingly over-stretched. Once again, we have seen the vital importance of face to face, locally accessible and familiar interaction and support for our many clients and volunteers during the past 12 months.

Anything which The Ridge is able to deliver depends upon the ongoing generosity and support of our partners and funders. This year saw the long-nurtured project within Black Bull Close reach the very exciting stage where The Ridge Foundations team began construction of a new build Support Centre and Training Kitchen alongside the painstaking restoration of north-side ruins within the historic Close. This will massively enhance our ability to deliver services and to provide a purpose-built and welcoming community hub. Per the model developed by The Ridge, the whole process provides invaluable high-quality training opportunities for local individuals through supported apprenticeships in Joinery and Stonemasonry, creating a skillful workforce to care for our precious built heritage into the future, and offering a way in to a rewarding career for many individuals who would otherwise have struggled to access and sustain such high quality skills training.

Thank you for your continued support and enjoy all the great stories within this report.



BOB FYFFE
Chairman of the Board

SUPPORT TEAM LOCAL, KNOWLEDGEABLE, COMPASSIONATE

2022-2023

OVER THE YEARS AS OUR HAS SERVICE DEVELOPED,

it has become clear that for many clients, at least in the short to medium term, secure employment or education is an unrealistic goal. There are many issues and concerns to address first. Positive outcomes initially can be more basic and core to health and wellbeing, such as stabilising periods of extended crisis, securing stable housing, addressing addiction issues, improving long-term health conditions, and helping to resolve family or relationship conflict.

Our Support Team provides access to counselling, and help to maximise income through securing benefit entitlement and many other issues. These are all factors that need to be addressed before people are in a stronger position to secure and sustain employment or education. As such, our Employability and Support service has developed over time to be more focused on Support and less on Employability, due to our clients' complex and deep-rooted needs and our responsibility to respond directly and compassionately to our local community. That said we have worked very successfully over the years to secure work or education outcomes for our clients wherever appropriate.

Over the last few years, the severe and ongoing impact of COVID on our community has led the Support Team to respond again to local need. We have created a safe and trusted space for the wider community to access support and we have remained accessible and front facing when many other services stopped or became remote. Being visible and accessible is key to our work and how it is perceived by those who use our service. Our focus has always been to respond to local need as it presents itself. The series of national crises through which we have been living (including impacts of Austerity, the COVID pandemic, Brexit, the war in Ukraine, and now the cost-of-living crisis) have touched all our lives, with many in the

community who had never had to navigate the benefits system before, and had never been in a position where they needed a foodbank referral, now in desperate need of support of one sort or another.

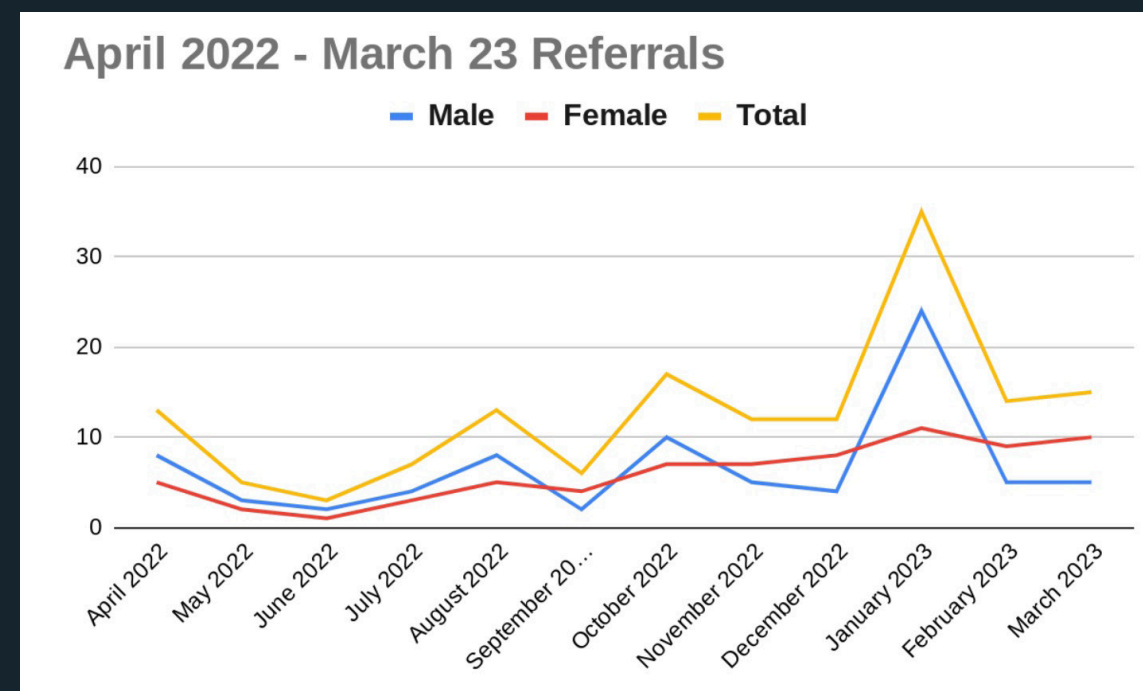
In our role we continue to benefit from the many professional and organisational relationships we have built up over the years, including the Job Centre, Foodbanks, ELC community outreach, Dunbar Grammar School, churches, community warden and many others.

We have worked hard to create a Support service that is Person Centered, Community Based, Collaborative, Holistic and Accessible, capable of Crisis Management and Long-Term Support but always focused on personal dignity and on supporting individuals and families to find and develop wherever possible the tools to cope, rather than fostering long-term dependency.

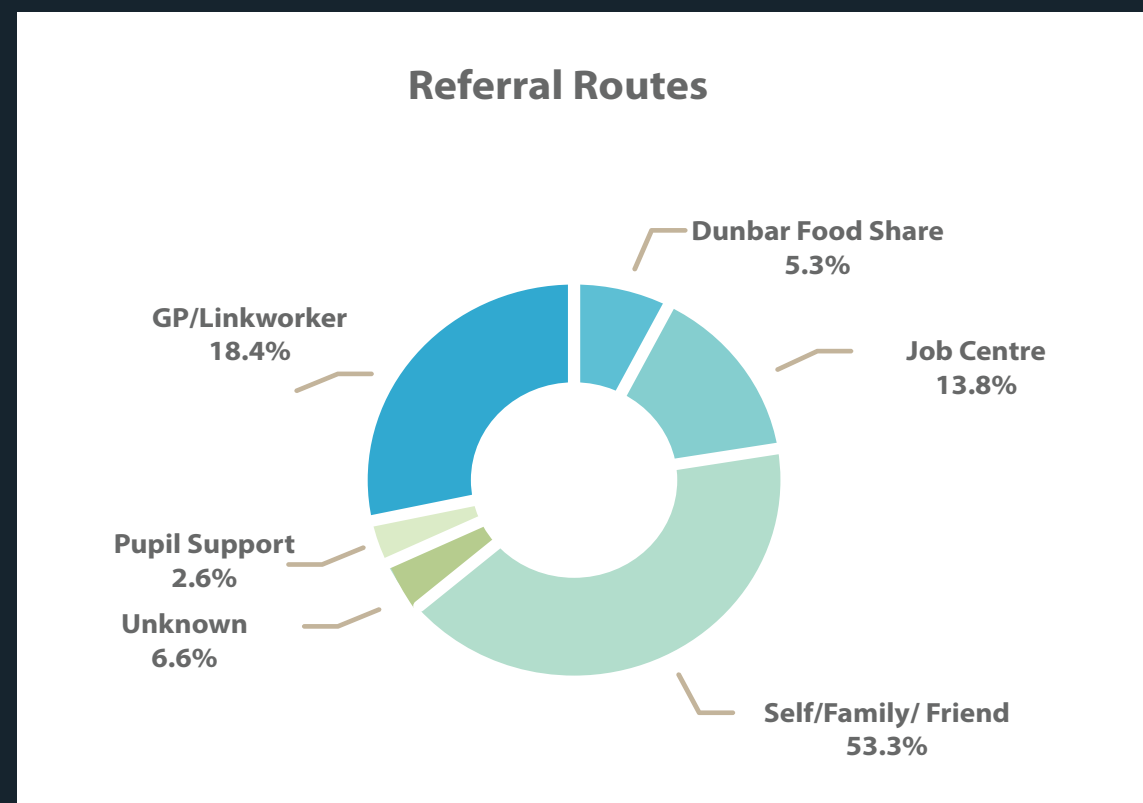
The problems and pressures caused by the cost-of-living crisis have again meant that many other members of our community are newly struggling with a whole range of issues. Those who were just coping after COVID are now finding daily life increasingly difficult. This has again meant a rapid and sustained uplift in our referral levels and another wider force shaping work and priorities of our support service. We worked with partners to bring our community specific support by opening our base to other services including weekly drop ins with Social Security Scotland, Universal Credit and monthly drop-ins with Business Gateway

2022-23 REFERRALS TO THE SUPPORT TEAM

Fig. 1



REFERRAL ROUTES



RECOVERY CAFE

The success and challenges of the Recovery Cafe in Dunbar have been remarkable, highlighting the necessity of such a space in addressing drug and alcohol use in the community and the impact on people's mental health. By providing an informal and welcoming environment, the Recovery Cafe has become a valuable resource for individuals seeking support, as well as an avenue for staff and volunteers to interact with the community.

With the lingering effects of COVID and the crippling toll that the cost of living crisis is taking, mental health concerns and substance use are skyrocketing across age groups. The need for safe and non-judgmental spaces has never been more urgent. Since the inception of the Recovery Cafe, a diverse range of individuals have come through the door, engaging with staff and volunteers. This informal access has proven to be a crucial form of crisis support, often leading to long-term recovery. Over time, the Recovery Cafe has evolved into a thriving community, particularly beneficial for the most vulnerable members who may experience limited social interaction. The provision of a safe and healthy environment not only fosters social bonds but also grants access to essential services, becoming a pivotal point in their journey to recovery. The significance of a warm meal and a welcoming smile cannot be underestimated.

Furthermore, the Recovery Cafe serves as a hub for various other services within the greater recovery community, promoting collaboration and mutual support. Organisations like MELD and Circle actively engage with the cafe, establishing a network of interconnected resources. Social Security Scotland also offers drop-in sessions, enabling community members to access support for devolved benefits conveniently.

Moreover, the Recovery Cafe has embraced the local artistic community, providing a platform for artists to showcase their work. Local musicians have performed, and art-based workshops have been organised, enriching the atmosphere and further enhancing well-being. The cafe hosts regular well-being workshops, incorporating mindfulness and guided meditation—proven methods that support and promote recovery.

While the Recovery Cafe has achieved significant success, it has not been without its challenges. Being the first of its kind in the community, the cafe had to overcome initial obstacles and the stigma associated with such services. The crucial aspect of running the cafe effectively involved assembling the right team of staff and volunteers. Prioritising individuals with lived experience of recovery and a deep understanding of the process and its challenges has been vital. These team members have also undergone recovery mentoring training to ensure the best possible support for service users.

Promoting the Recovery Cafe and reducing stigma within the community presented another hurdle: identifying and reaching out to individuals who could benefit most from the service posed a challenge. However, leveraging existing partnerships and collaborating with local organisations proved to be an effective strategy. Social media and local advertisements also played a significant role in attracting individuals from diverse backgrounds, fostering inclusivity, and combating the stigma surrounding recovery.

The impact of the Recovery Cafe on the community has been evident through the positive feedback received. Attendees have expressed their appreciation for the range of services offered, catering to different age groups and individuals. They have commended the friendly and supportive community that brings people together. The cafe's support workers have received praise for their dedication and the opportunities for one-on-one sessions have been highly valued. Such feedback underscores the importance and success of the Recovery Cafe in addressing the community's needs.

Looking to the future, the Recovery Cafe will continue to play a pivotal role in maintaining recovery and promoting mental well-being within the community. As the stigma surrounding recovery is challenged and more individuals from diverse backgrounds access the service, the influence of the cafe will continue to grow.

RECOVERY FESTIVAL



The inaugural Festival aimed to break down barriers, challenge stereotypes, and celebrate the power of recovery. With a diverse range of events, workshops, live performances, and informative sessions, the Festival successfully raised awareness of the recovery community while emphasising the crucial role played by the wider community in supporting individuals on their journey to recovery. The Festival left no stone unturned in its mission to provide a platform for creativity, wellness, and education. Creative workshops such as screen printing, ceramic and clay workshops, sign writing, and stone stacking allowed participants to explore their artistic side, unleashing their imagination and nurturing self-expression. Meanwhile, DJ workshops led by DJ Sam and Freed Up provided an opportunity for aspiring DJs to learn and refine their skills, empowering them to pursue their passion. Therapeutic taster sessions like acupuncture, Indian head massage, meditation, and gong bath offered moments of relaxation, rejuvenation, and inner peace, reinforcing the importance of holistic well-being in the recovery journey.

Additionally, wellness workshops such as surf therapy provided a unique and invigorating experience, allowing individuals to connect with nature while discovering the therapeutic benefits of the sea. Informative sessions, including Naloxone training, ensured that attendees had access to valuable knowledge and resources to address and prevent overdose-related emergencies. These sessions empowered individuals to become agents of change within their communities, saving lives and reducing the stigma associated with substance use disorders.

THE POWER OF LIVE PERFORMANCES AND SPEAKERS:

Music has the ability to touch hearts and unite souls, and the Festival recognised this by showcasing six bands and singers whose performances captivated the audience. The power of live music transcended boundaries, fostering a sense of connection and joy. Speakers' events featuring renowned figures like Darren McGarvey, along with shared stories of lived experiences, provided a platform for individuals to discuss their personal journeys, triumphs, and challenges. These powerful narratives shattered stereotypes, inspired empathy, and promoted understanding, making a profound impact on all who attended.

INCLUSIVITY, RECOVERY, AND COMMUNITY:

The Festival fostered a sense of inclusivity and community by organising a recovery drop-in centre. Attendees were treated to soup, cakes, tea, and coffee, creating a warm and inviting environment for meaningful conversations and connections. This safe space encouraged individuals to share their stories, seek support, and build relationships based on empathy and understanding. The Street Food and Open Day at Empire Close further strengthened community bonds. With an open mic session, mocktails, and delectable street food and pizzas prepared by the cooking group, attendees indulged in culinary delights while enjoying the vibrant atmosphere and celebrating the spirit of recovery.

The Festival's impact was felt both within the local community and beyond. With 208 individual bookings and approximately 175 attendees at the Sunday open day, the event garnered significant interest and participation. The dedication of a couple who traveled from Edinburgh specifically for the Festival exemplifies its influence, showcasing the profound reach and resonance it achieved.



BOB FYFFE

CHAIR

With many years of senior leadership in the Faith and Voluntary sectors, Bob is an Executive Coach and Mentor who has a strong sense of social justice. He has extensive governance experience with various charities including a number of years as a Trustee of Christian Aid. Bob

has enjoyed working in community based innovative projects in the past and The Ridge offers an opportunity to continue that.

He enjoys photography, travel and has recently learned to kayak.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Team



HEATHER BLACKWOOD

SECRETARY

Heather was born in Inverness and moved to Edinburgh to study law. She has been a lawyer for 40 years, initially as a court practitioner. In 1993, she became a tribunal judge with the Social Security Appeal tribunal. In 2005 she was appointed as a legal member of the Mental Health Tribunal for Scotland (MHTS) and she continues to work part time as a Convener of Mental Health Tribunals. She served on the Parole Board for Scotland from 2008 and became vice chairman in 2011. Heather and her husband moved to Dunbar from Paisley in 2015. Her interests include dog walking, gardening and drawing and painting.



DANNY KELLY

TREASURER

Originally from Greenock, Danny is a graduate of Glasgow University and a Chartered Accountant. He worked in the accounting profession in Scotland and Europe for a number of years before joining the oil industry in the early eighties. He spent most of his oil industry career with Total (French oil major); working in the UK as well as a number of overseas postings - Middle East, France and most recently Kazakhstan. In addition to financial positions, his career latterly focused on transporting and marketing production from a large central Asian field. Retired in 2015, Formerly living in Aberdeen, Danny and his wife relocated to East Lothian in 2018 to be nearer their grandchildren (and two children!).



LIAM ROSS

TRUSTEE

Liam is an architect, and a lecturer in Architectural Design at the University of Edinburgh. He has experience of work in Edinburgh, London and New York, on projects in the UK, USA, Russia and UAE. Prior to becoming a lecturer, he spent 5 years with Malcolm Fraser Architects, leading and assisting on award-winning projects at all stages of the design process. Among his roles at the University, he has led initiatives designed to create employment and outreach opportunities. In 2012 - with colleague Lisa Moffit - he established 'ESALA Projects', a means to support staff and students engaging in pro-bono design consultancy for clients in the public and charitable sector.



ANDY PRINGLE

TRUSTEE

Born in Aberdeen, Andy has moved around Scotland, graduating from Glasgow University many years ago, then chasing the technology industry from Greenock to Glenrothes, most recently working for semiconductor and photonics companies in Edinburgh and Livingston. He moved to Dunbar in 2013 and, now is keen to help develop the unique environment this town offers. He has recently retired from the workplace and hopes his skills in general management and data analysis can help the Ridge, which he joined as trustee in November 2022. The aims of the Ridge - supporting and helping people develop their life skills, improving the environment for the community, and restoring dilapidated old buildings - are a good fit with his personal interests.



ROB BISSET

TRUSTEE

Rob has lived in Dunbar nearly his whole life. He spent all his working life at the local cement works, eventually reaching the post of Chief Electrical and Process Control Engineer. He has previously held director positions at Edinburgh and District Employers Training Association Ltd (EETA), Dunbar Community Development Company (DCDC) as a representative of the Dunbar Community Sports Clubs Association and at Hallhill Ltd. His hobbies are campervanning, geocaching, birdwatching and gardening, and a strong interest in the history and development of Dunbar, tracing some of his town ancestry back to the 17th Century.



JOHN IRVINE

TRUSTEE

John spent his career as a Chartered Surveyor, latterly as UK Development Director for an international property group. He has experience in managing teams of employees and consultants engaged in the development process, as well as the strategy and running of a large company. John has also held appointments as a voluntary director for a housing association and for Architecture and Design Scotland. He is now retired and spends his time rowing, cycling, running and gardening (aches and pains permitting!).

THE RIDGE

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES, TRANSFORMING LIVES

Since 2012

Are you driven by a desire to empower individuals, restore neglected spaces, and create lasting change? Look no further than The Ridge, a vibrant and dynamic Dunbar based charity seeking dedicated individuals like you to join our team of trustees. At the heart of our mission lies a deep commitment to improving the lives of people within our community. Established with the core purpose of providing accessible support and training, The Ridge has become a trusted and influential force for change.

Our charitable work encompasses three key pillars:

Provision of Locally Accessible Support and Training:

The Ridge is dedicated to ensuring that no one is left behind. We provide essential support and training to those facing disadvantages, whether it be due to socioeconomic factors, lack of opportunities, or other personal challenges. By breaking down barriers and offering accessible resources such as confidence and wellbeing workshops, a Recovery Cafe and counselling, we empower individuals to develop vital life skills, enhance their employability, and create a positive direction for their futures.

Support and Empowerment for Life Skills:

We recognise that navigating life's challenges can be particularly difficult for some. That's why The Ridge is committed to providing

ongoing support and empowerment to those struggling to access important practical life skills. Through our diverse programmes, workshops, and mentoring initiatives, we equip individuals with the tools they need to overcome obstacles, build resilience, and thrive in their personal and professional lives. We deliver a wide range of training opportunities from vocational options such as floristry, to Modern Apprenticeships in Joinery and Stonemasonry as well as delivering National Progression Awards and National Certificates to school children from across the county in our capacity as an SQA-accredited centre.

Restoration of Derelict or Dilapidated Land and Buildings:

We believe in the transformative power of physical spaces. The Ridge takes pride in restoring derelict or dilapidated land and buildings to benefit the community, providing opportunities as an integral part of the restoration process, for individuals to rebuild their own lives through learning skills and being part of the physical process of regeneration. By breathing new life into neglected areas, we create thriving spaces for connection, recreation, and educational opportunities. Our restoration projects not only enhance the community's overall well-being but also provide spaces for our programmes and services to flourish, meeting local needs and contributing to the economic resilience of the organisation and of the wider community.

Why Become a Trustee?

As a trustee of The Ridge, you will play a pivotal role in shaping the strategic direction and impact of our charity. By joining our diverse and dynamic team, you will have the opportunity to make a tangible difference in the lives of those in need. As a trustee, you will:

Drive Change:

Contribute to the development and implementation of our longterm strategy, ensuring that we continue to address the evolving needs of our community and effectively deliver our charitable purposes.

Make an Impact:

Have a direct influence on the lives of the more marginalised members of our community, helping them gain access to vital support, training, and life skills that can transform their future trajectories.

Shape the Community:

Contribute to the revitalisation of neglected spaces, turning them into vibrant community assets that foster connection, growth, pride of place, and well-being.

Grow Personally and Professionally:

Benefit from valuable networking opportunities, gain new skills, and broaden your understanding of the charitable sector, all while making a significant impact.

Join a Supportive Team:

Become part of a passionate and dedicated group of individuals who are committed to creating positive change. Our collaborative approach ensures that you will have the support and guidance you need to thrive in your role as a trustee.

How to Apply:

If you are excited about the prospect of joining The Ridge or want to learn more about being a trustee and making a meaningful difference in our community, please get in touch. We welcome individuals with a range of backgrounds, skills, and experiences to join us on this incredible journey. To express your interest or request more information, please visit our website : www.the-ridge.org.uk or email us at heather@the-ridge.org.uk



Photo top left

Newly qualified joiner, Caspar Huntly and award winning joinery apprentice, Gracie Brill enjoying a moment in the winter sun



Photo bottom left

Slab pour work as we start the construction of the new Support Centre for Dunbar

Photo opposite right

3rd year Joinery Apprentice, Leon Danvers mastering his workshop skills



Photo bottom right

Representatives from TRF and SPAB at the award ceremony

THE RIDGE FOUNDATIONS TRAINING, APPRENTICESHIPS AND RESTORATION

Over the past year, the Ridge Foundations (TRF) has continued with its work across a number of derelict historic town centre sites in Dunbar, including Black Bull Close, Flesher's Close, Empire Close and 88 High Street. In support of the work of The Ridge SCIO, TRF has continued to secure and deliver on commercial contracts; the ability to do so is vital in terms of sustainability but also in terms of breadth of experience for our team of trainees and apprentices. This year, TRF has generated a surplus of

£25,548.53, which will be paid up to the SCIO, supporting delivery of its charitable purposes. TRF had expected to carry out the restoration work on the north side of Black Bull Close, with an external contractor delivering the new build elements (Support Centre, Training Kitchen etc), but with the extraordinary spiraling of construction costs, third party involvement was not affordable, and TRF have stepped up to the challenge of the new build also. This is providing a fantastically broad learning experience for trainees, and a big step up for the team overall.

We continue to offer opportunities to those who would otherwise struggle to access/sustain such training, with two pre-apprenticeship trainees who joined the Joinery team last year progressing into apprenticeships where they are flourishing. Our first graduates completed their 4-year apprenticeships: Darren in Stonemasonry and Caspar in Joinery. Both have progressed to full employment within the TRF team, supporting junior members, and role modeling success. We have new opportunities opening up, with newly-planned Pre-Apprenticeship courses offering progression routes including from the schools' National Progression Award groups into TRF apprenticeships – another great positive pathway for those struggling to establish a successful route through life. As the wholly-owned trading subsidiary of the Ridge SCIO, the Ridge Foundations CIC continued to operate as the SCIO's main contractor across its various sites, exploiting the potential for personal transformation through the transformation of the degraded local historic built environment.

The SCIO's support team, alongside a flexible and supportive TRF trainer team, has provided a vital element in this, enabling individuals to weather challenging moments which might have derailed their training and employment in a more conventional setting.

We are immensely proud to have had our teams' work recognised with the SPAB award for Sustainable Conservation. This is a huge plaudit, from a nationally prestigious conservation body, which looked at 80 properties from across the UK. 'Roger's Land' (the focus of the award), was the first of our ruinous restorations within Black Bull Close to be transformed through the work of a group of Ridge apprentices, whose personal journey was mirrored in the restoration of an abandoned and rejected roofless ruin. It is now making a vital contribution to The Ridge's work and to the wider community, providing workshop space for young people not thriving in a school setting to learn joinery skills, and a multipurpose space which houses meetings, classes and workshops. It is a beautiful historic building which embodies local vernacular heritage and history, and shows what can be achieved using almost entirely local materials (the glass had to be bought in), local skills and almost no plastic. A true eco-build for the benefit of all.



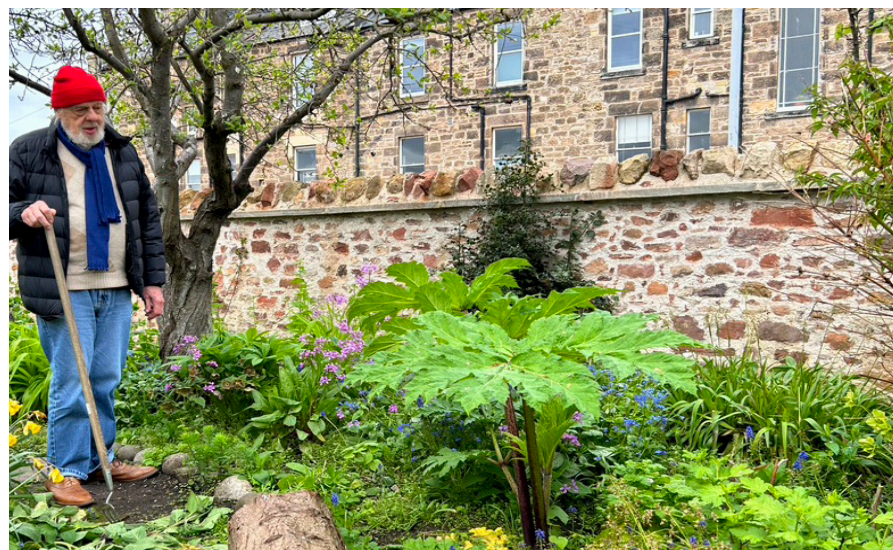


Photo top left

Volunteer Tony working hard as part of our rusty Knees Gardening Club



Photo bottom left

Two of our school group learning about where their food comes from and how the Backlands were used to grow food for families and businesses

Photo opposite right

Youngsters in our summer groups learning about the wonders of Cyanotype printing



THE RIDGE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CONNECTING COMMUNITIES SHAPING FUTURES

We have engaged with a wide range of local groups and general public of all ages, including school groups to locals who have never visited the sites, all of whom have been surprised and delighted to discover all of these historic spaces and construction activities on their doorstep and in their town. These include - High Street neighbours who have not visited before, school kids from Dunbar Primary who need additional support, Dementia-Support groups and some clients from wellbeing groups. Many of the visitors would not normally think of engaging with history and heritage and have been very interested in what's going on after a visit. Although we have engaged with a wide range of groups we hope to continue to build on that and increase our reach in Year 2.

Over the course of the year we have welcomed over 210 people at events, walks, talks and tours of the sites and have had many more conversations with passersby and drop-ins and interested locals who have got in touch and want to get involved. We have used the last year to visit and make contact with a range of different groups from the dementia carers, to arts groups, to people from wellbeing groups and schools.

How do we do it? From tours to find out about the plants growing in the garden to stories about horses' teeth found in the garden or fragments of buildings, a cobblers shoe last or a cannonball found on site, there are lots of ways to engage with people about the stories and history of the site in an accessible way. We have encouraged the groups to come up with their own ideas for participation in workshops. For example there have been walk-and-talks, photography sessions looking at the surrounding environment and we have had fantastic discussions about local folklore, people and histories of places.

We have worked with groups from Dunbar Primary and a range of kids who are at risk of being excluded from school or are struggling with mainstream education. Sessions have evolved informed by needs and interests. It is rewarding to see how youngsters identify with certain activities they particularly like and develop them in subsequent sessions. These sessions have highlighted the impact and worth in making different environments available to children who struggle within the confines of the traditional world of academia. In this alternative setting they have all responded extremely well to going out and about, exploring and learning about the spaces, activities and people of the Ridge. Making apple juice in the press and soap carving letters and pulling up vegetables (and inventing their own recipes at home - unprompted) were amongst some of the most well-received activities. Many of the children have not engaged with their local history and heritage before.

TRAINING TEAM UNCOVERING SKILLS

It has been another successful year of training at The Ridge both in our Empire Close Stonemasonry & Bricklaying site and in the Woodwork training room in Black Bull Close, delivering SCQF level 5 Construction skills & SCQF level 4 Construction Craft & Technician to students from schools all over East Lothian. Both the dedication from our trainers and a willingness to learn on the part of our students has seen great results this year. 15 Students have achieved a full award in Construction Skills at NPA 5 with a further 4 passing 2 out of 3 modules. 10 Students achieved their full award in Construction Craft & Technician or NPA 4 with a further 10 passing at least 2/3 practical modules.

It is important to add that success here at the Ridge is not always about hard results and numbers. Arguably more important is the notion of soft outcomes. That is the focus on instilling confidence and self-esteem in the student school groups we welcome to the Ridge. This we hope sets them up better for life beyond school. Enabling them to make better decisions now or giving them more options outside the school gates will, we hope, lead to a better future for them all.

The training programme for 2023 to 2024 has already been set in motion, working in partnership with East Lothian Works we have welcomed in all the new applicants for next year's programme. This came in the form of a "meet the trainers day" - applicants were put through a number of simple and fun tests resulting in the trainers choosing the most suitable candidates for next year. This has been necessary as the applicant numbers have far exceeded our facilities' capacity



There have been some great success stories this year, 4 students from our NPA 5 course went straight into apprenticeship jobs of their desired choice and reports suggest they are all doing well.

Further to this one of our local students from Dunbar Grammar school has been taken on as a new Stone Masonry trainee as part of The Ridge Foundations apprenticeship programme. His dedication and his willingness to learn has already earned him respect among Ridge staff.

Photo top right
NPA 4 Students cladding a 1 to 5 scale house, all built by the school groups as part of their course

Photo bottom right
Ben Gilmour with his completed joinery project - Now working at the Ridge Foundations as our new stonemasonry trainee



GARDENING TEAM CULTIVATING SUCCESS

During 2022- 23 we have had very limited access to our much-loved Backlands Garden due to the exciting development work being carried out. We hope to be back in there soon and come next year we will be reporting once again on both our sites. Empire Close Garden continues to blossom into a vibrant oasis operating organically and following Charles Dowding's No-Dig approach. This hidden gem stands as a testament to the power of unity, sustainability, and the belief that even the most overlooked of spaces can sow seeds of profound change.

For years the site that now hosts the Empire Close Gardens was barren wasteland, scattered with debris and forgotten dreams and memories from its time as a cinema. The past year our staff team and volunteers have continued to breathe life into the transformation, creating a shared vision, making space for people to come together, pooling collective skills and resources.

As the garden has flourished, so has the sense of community within its walls. People from all walks of life, irrespective of age, background, or socioeconomic status, find connection and inspiration in the Empire Close Garden, which has become a hub for interaction, offering a calm and welcoming sanctuary for all. One of the garden's most impactful aspects lies in the opportunities it provides for volunteering. It serves as a catalyst for individuals seeking purpose and social connection. It offers a chance for marginalised members of the community, who may face barriers to employment or struggle with social isolation, to actively contribute and feel valued.

Volunteers engage in a range of activities, from tending the garden beds and nurturing plants to participating in community events and workshops. Through their involvement, they not only gain valuable skills in horticulture and sustainable practices but also experience a renewed sense of self-worth and pride in their contribution to the community's collective well-being. Beyond the social aspects, the Empire Close Garden provides a fertile ground for improving the health and well-being of its members. Engaging in gardening activities is now recognised to have numerous physical and mental health benefits. The



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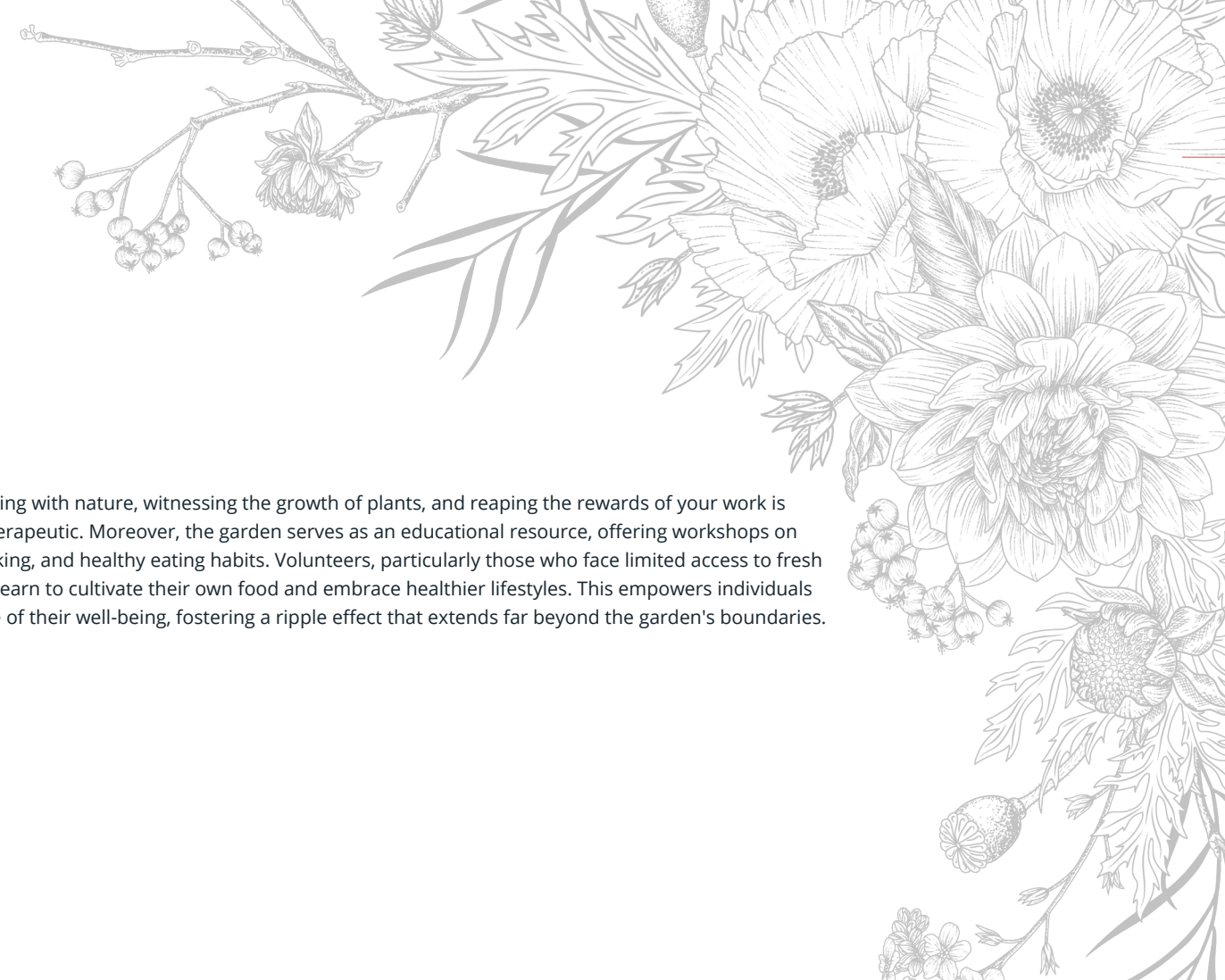
As this vibrant garden continues to flourish, it serves as a reminder that beauty can emerge from even the most overlooked places. It is a symbol of hope, resilience, and the boundless potential for positive change when a community unites for a common purpose

*Photo left page
Aquilegia and bumble bee*

*Photo right page
BUY A BUCKET - The Ridge's
floral subscription offering.
Local, seasonal and good for
the community!*

act of connecting with nature, witnessing the growth of plants, and reaping the rewards of your work is immensely therapeutic. Moreover, the garden serves as an educational resource, offering workshops on nutrition, cooking, and healthy eating habits. Volunteers, particularly those who face limited access to fresh produce, can learn to cultivate their own food and embrace healthier lifestyles. This empowers individuals to take charge of their well-being, fostering a ripple effect that extends far beyond the garden's boundaries.

If you want to experience a bit of Empire Close at home, why not consider joining our "Buy a Bucket" scheme. The scheme costs £5 to join which gets you the all important bucket which is beautifully filled with local seasonal blooms grown in our gardens. Each bucket is then priced according to which blooms are in season. A small but beautiful weekly joy and an easy way to contribute to our work.



CHRISTMAS AT THE RIDGE COMMUNITY CHEER

Christmas is a time of joy, love, and togetherness. However, for many families facing financial difficulties, the holiday season can be incredibly challenging. As is now tradition, The Ridge in partnership with The Rotary, Dunbar FoodShare and East Lothian Council's Connected Communities helped spread Christmas cheer far and wide throughout the Ward hosting a lunch for 50 and delivering a further 53 meals to homes.

ELC Connected Communities launched a Voucher Scheme to help families in need during Christmas 2022. This project made a significant impact on the lives of numerous families in the East Lothian area.

The Dunbar Rotary organised the fabulous Angel Tree as well as the collections and sorting of all the gifts. The generosity of the Dunbar Community and the effort and commitment of the volunteers involved is always hugely uplifting and

heartwarming ultimately resulting in families receiving help and support with dignity and respect.

In total, 28 vouchers were distributed to families, with 78 children also receiving gifts from the Angel Tree. Most of the families supported were those on free school meals or low incomes, whose finances were being further constrained by the challenges of the cost-of-living crisis. Additionally, three families were supported in January, further highlighting the importance of extending the support beyond the holiday season.

The Christmas Day Meal proved to be a huge hit once again, the catering by Barbarella Beets received glowing feedback, adding to the festive spirit of the occasion. The meal was served at the Parish Hall and was complemented by the sharing of presents to families. While there were some challenges, such as a few families needing their meals delivered due to illness, the event was overall a success, thanks to the fantastic team of volunteers who assisted with the organisation and running of the programme. - Santa's helpers.

The referrals for the Christmas Day Meal came through The Ridge, Dunbar Foodshare, and other organisations like Dunbar Grammar. Our army of Volunteers from the Rotary and other groups delivered meals to families who couldn't attend the sit-down meal at the hall.



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“This help has been a godsend and the boys loved their gifts, people have been so generous”.
(Single mum of 3)

“Lifesaver I can't thank you enough”
(Kinship carer Granny)

“This is such a relief Thank you”
(Dad blended family West Barns)

“Food vouchers have been really helpful I have just had a stay in hospital and Christmas was going to be a bit poor this year”
(Parent with two children and one disabled child)



*Photo above
Santa and helper.*

NEVER DOUBT
THAT A SMALL
GROUP OF
THOUGHTFUL,
COMMITTED
CITIZENS
CAN CHANGE
THE WORLD.
INDEED,
IT IS THE ONLY
THING THAT
EVER HAS.

MARGARET MEAD

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