



the bridge

CONNECTING HOME WITH HOPE

IMPACT REPORT SEPTEMBER 23 - AUGUST 24

IMPROVING EVERYDAY WELLBEING

417

PEOPLE SUPPORTED

3

WELLBEING SERVICES

115

Individuals supported with financial wellbeing

144

Individuals supported with 1 to 1 counselling

158

Individuals supported with groups and courses

Connecting Home with Hope

This year's impact report reflects a pivotal chapter in our organisation's journey, shaped by the extraordinary dedication and hard work of our staff and volunteers. Their unwavering commitment has been the driving force behind everything we've achieved, from providing vital support to individuals and families to fostering an environment where wellbeing and connection flourish. At the heart of these efforts lies our Wellbeing Hub, which has truly come to life over the past year as a vibrant space for community, growth, and transformation.

Our three core services have been busier than ever, reflecting the growing needs of our community. We have been privileged to walk alongside those we support, offering practical and emotional help at a time when it is most needed. Much of this success has been made possible through working in partnership with local organisations. By collaborating closely, especially in rural areas, we've been able to strengthen our reach and deliver tailored support where it is needed most.

2024 has also been a year of significant change for us. After ten years of dedicated leadership, our CEO, Alan, made the decision to step down on health grounds. This marks the end of an era but also opens the door to fresh opportunities. During this transition, we have been fortunate to benefit from the steady and thoughtful leadership of our Interim CEO, Maria, whose care and focus have been instrumental in guiding us through this time of change.

As we reflect on a year of growth and transformation, we also look forward with hope and determination to the opportunities ahead. Thank you for your continued support as we work to build a stronger, more resilient community together.



Our **Financial Wellbeing** team have been able to support **90** individuals in a person centred way and **25** individuals in group sessions to improve their financial Wellbeing.

We primarily worked with individuals living in **rural areas** and those experiencing **mental health challenges**, with many clients disclosing multiple areas of **vulnerability**.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 115 Individuals supported | 295 Support Interventions | 296k Debt Supported |
| Majority of clients live in Rural areas | 18 Cases closed | 16 out of 18 Closed clients reported Mental Health Vulnerability: |
| 2-3 months Average waiting time for first appointment | 57 Separate vulnerability categories reported by 16 clients | 'Token Payment' The most common debt solution |
| 2 Group courses delivered | 0 Complaints | 100% Client Service Satisfaction |

Our impact has ensured that clients:



are less stressed



keep on top of finances



have improved mental wellbeing



more money per month (+ £27)



are more connected to their community



have less debt

“ The team of advisers at the bridge have spent so much time explaining, supporting and encouraging me when it comes to understanding my finances including any bills, budgeting, banking. They have been patient and kind and I 100% am ready!



“ I'm so grateful to u for helping me see there is a future & not give-up ... & big thank you to The bridge. I wasn't very well last few months when you visited me & really wasn't looking forward to christmas or the new year but you was so, so caring & understood





the bridge
financial wellbeing service

As an organisation supporting predominantly vulnerable adults, we implemented additional safeguards to mitigate the risk of self-harm, including:



Offering **home visits**, meetings in **confidential** public areas, or **close to clients** home. Online meetings are also available



Our service is **patient, adaptable** and **versatile**. We offer a **holistic individual focused** service that is **not time restricted**.



Accesible parking and disability toilets available



Our **interview rooms** are on the ground floor with **easy access** and are designed to create a **homely atmosphere**.



We operate a **triage system** to identify clients with **urgent** or **vulnerable needs**.



We aim to **give** clients the time that they need and we are always ready to **listen**. All clients are treated with **respect** and **sensitivity** to their **needs**.



Every **client** has indicated a **personalised debt option** preference which our centre has **respected**.



All categories of **vulnerability** are recorded to ensure each client is provided with all **support** they need to avoid any risk of **additional harm**.



Regular **training** about **vulnerability** and **mental health** is offered to volunteers and staff.



Our service has strong **connections** with other organisations so our clients are often referred or signposted to places that can offer **additional support**



Every **Financial Wellbeing** client has an opportunity to use our **Bridge Counselling** support **free of charge**.

Our service also offers a range of Practical Support which is focused on being person centred and will improve someones financial wellbeing. This has included

- ✓ 1 to 1 cooking & recipe bags
- ✓ Group cooking & recipe bags



- ✓ Budgeting packs and 1 to 1 advice
- ✓ Aldi Vouchers & Energy top ups
- ✓ Signposting for emergency support
- ✓ Volunteer opportunities and community connection
- ✓ Support with appointments
- ✓ Small community grants
- ✓ Support with warm home discounts
- ✓ Support for families

We have also developed a new group course that is focused on budgeting and healthy eating.

- Group courses:**
- ✓ Managing money
 - ✓ Eat Well on a budget



- Explore topics of:**
- ✓ Financial peace of mind
 - ✓ Creating a budget
 - ✓ Easy ways to save
 - ✓ Tips to find the best deals
 - ✓ Save on food shopping
 - ✓ Meal Planning
 - ✓ Understanding food labels
 - ✓ Creating a meal plan



CLIENT STORY:

When the client was first referred to us, they were overwhelmed with anxiety and struggling under the weight of a PTSD diagnosis. One of their biggest worries was debt, yet they were unsure of how much they owed or who they owed it to. Living with MS and battling loneliness and depression, the client also faced physical challenges that made daily life more difficult.

During our first visit, we sat down together and listened to their concerns. They shared their struggles with keeping track of income and spending and revealed they had recently resorted to using a foodbank. We explained how the Bridge Community Project could support them, emphasising confidentiality and our commitment to working alongside them every step of the way. Together, we gathered the unopened letters and reassured them that we would help make sense of it all. To provide immediate relief, we also gave them Aldi vouchers to ease the strain of buying essentials.

Over the following months, we worked together to tackle their financial challenges. We contacted creditors, their landlord, the local authority, and their energy provider, gradually building a clearer picture of their situation. Through persistence and collaboration, we negotiated a £300 debt write-off on mental health grounds and secured £529 from an energy company's hardship fund, clearing all their gas and electric arrears. Setting up monthly direct debits brought structure and predictability to their finances, replacing overwhelming quarterly bills with manageable payments.

Beyond the practicalities, we empowered the client to take control of their financial future. Pension paperwork that once felt baffling became understandable, and we guided them toward resources like PensionWise to explore their options independently. Their growing confidence was evident when they decided to apply for Adult Disability Payment entirely on their own, a step they once would have found daunting.

Ten months after our first meeting, the transformation was remarkable. What began as confusion and anxiety evolved into clarity, confidence, and control. With their debts cleared, financial arrangements in place, and a newfound sense of independence, the client felt ready to move forward. We mutually agreed to close their file, knowing they were in a much better place than when we first met.

This story highlights the profound impact that compassionate, holistic support can have on someone's life. It's not just about resolving debts—it's about restoring dignity, confidence, and peace of mind.

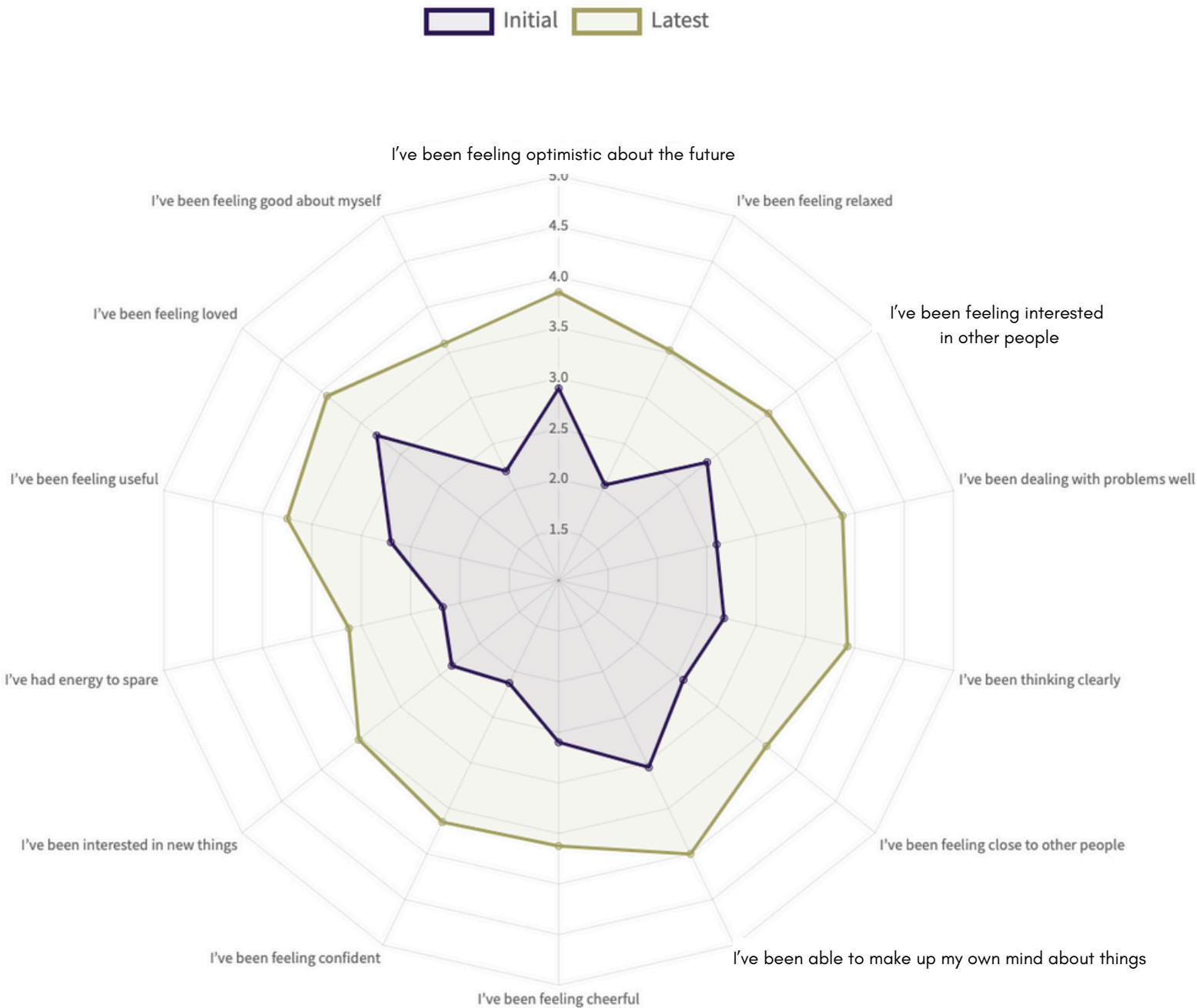


Our Counselling team have been able to support **144** individuals to improve their emotional wellbeing while offering **1427** counselling sessions. Our service provides affordable mental health support in a safe environment.

The most common presenting issues are

ANXIETY/STRESS DEPRESSION BEREAVEMENT TRAUMA SUICIDAL IDEATION

We used the Warwick Edinburgh Evaluation tool to measure a clients response before and after counselling. The results give a clear visual representation of the impact made.





the bridge
counselling service

95% of clients indicated an increase in their ability to cope more emotionally

85% of clients indicated an increase in being able to understand their own life circumstances

90% of clients indicated an increase in their resilience

90% of clients indicated an increase in their self esteem



I have struggled to come to terms with bipolar as I was diagnosed in my 30's, being able to access counselling has been really important step in my journey. Working with a counsellor was a positive experience which has helped me to accept it more and helped me towards being more resilient when I have bad days. The Bridge is a really positive place, with caring counsellors and staff for which I am thankful.



Initially I felt that the anxiety I was feeling came directly from the substance misuse of a close member of my family. Not being able to help or understand why they were making the choices they were making. Through the counselling process I was able to discuss this, looking deeper into the ways this had affected me, talk through many situations in my life making sense of them and the way they impacted on my current situation. Understanding the past and allowing this to support me through the present and the future has had a huge impact on my growth and how I deal with challenging situations. If I'd not attended counselling, and opened up I honestly believe that I would still be anxious, fearful and in a heightened emotional state. I trusted the process and I currently feel that a huge weight has been lifted.





“

I had a very hard year prior to starting counselling. I had nearly died and needed emergency surgery, a family member was diagnosed with cancer and I had relationship issues. It was a lot and I was close to a full mental breakdown and on anxiety medication. I thought I had disappeared. I now finish my counselling confident, clear headed and ready for the future. Counselling has changed me for the better. An amazing place and amazing staff. Thank you, you don't know how much this truly means.

”

“

I was exhausted with life, guilt ridden, sad and at times didn't want to be here!! I have depression and for many years believed that I wasn't good enough, criticising myself for actions or verbal comments I'd make then playing these scenarios over and over in my head. My counsellor supported me explore my thought process which allow me to put my distorted beliefs into perspective! She listen without judgement and gave me the confidence and tools to start doing things differently, think differently!! Life feels different, it feels good.

”

“

I had suffered two bereavements of family members I was really close to and hadn't fully registered it, then I had something happen end of last year that caused me to try and take my own life and I was in a very bad way. I knew I needed help and didn't want to be stuck on anti depression medication so I was referred to the bridge as the wait times for nhs counselling was a very long wait.

I have never done counselling before so didn't know what to expect as a typical man I never thought about speaking about my feelings. I was apprehensive about the full experience and myself and my counsellor had a safety plan written out incase i had negative feelings about ending my life again and how I can seek help from friends and family and what steps to take to get myself out of that head space seeing this written down definitely helped.

I would say counselling had definitely saved me in just being able to talk about how I really felt regardless of how scary it was and all the silences in the counselling room filling it with things I felt I needed to get out.

There was one week where I had a lot on my mind and had a wobble with starting to feel bad again about life we spoke about it in counselling and when my time was up for my session I had the physical feeling of a weight being lifted off my shoulders which was a relief knowing it had helped.

Counselling if needed is an amazing tool that should be utilised even if daughtning at first to speak to someone you don't know it may just save your life more than you know it.

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Our Stepping Stones to Wellbeing team have been able to support **158** individuals to improve their financial and emotional wellbeing through offering **23** groups and courses across the past year.



BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT COURSE

7 courses completed

A seven week course that provides a safe and confidential space for connecting with other people who have lost a loved one



ANXIETY MATTERS

5 groups completed

Three week course that explores anxiety and how it can affect our thoughts, feelings and behaviours



STEPPING STONE CONNECTIONS

5 groups completed

A monthly group that was setup by previous participants who wanted to meet on a more regular basis



EMOTIONAL LIFEJACKET COURSE

3 groups completed

This is a one day course held at a local woodland retreat centre where we introduce resources that support emotional and physical well-being. This includes ideas on how to improve sleep, gentle yoga for beginners, the benefits of aromatherapy, improving your sleep and mindful walking.



SHARING SKILLS FOR LIFE

1 group completed

This is a three week course where we explore topics including mental wellbeing, healthy eating, budgeting and being active.



READING FOR WELLBEING

1 group completed

A five-week reading and discussion group for those who enjoy reading and wish to explore readings focused on wellbeing concepts in a small group.



LOOKING AFTER YOUR MENTAL WELLBEING

1 group completed

This is a five week course that explores the concept of mental well-being and how to look after it as you move forward with life.

“

I'm only just recovering from a prolonged period of really poor mental health, this group was perfect for me to start finding my feet on the road to recovery as it was small and not too intimidating

”

“

There were a lot of tools and new ideas about how to manage anxiety and information about how the brain works. Sometimes we don't think about anxiety and it was helpful to understand how a body shuts down as I have never known that before. When I had a bad day and I was trying the breathing exercises Janet taught us with the bubbles. Janet was listening to us and taking ideas from us too.

”

“

The facilitators were excellent, they made the time very special and were sensitive to the needs of each individual and the group as a whole. They led with care and compassion and made the day fun and precious time to relax and recharge. Activities were a perfect mix for the group. Would highly recommend this course!

”

STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Over the past year, we have focused on strengthening our volunteer team across all services, thanks to additional funding from the Scottish Government. This support has allowed us to expand our capacity, particularly in counselling, enabling us to increase the number of clients we are able to see on a weekly basis. Across all our work, our incredible volunteers have given an astounding **6,000** hours of their time. Their dedication and generosity have been instrumental in extending our reach and deepening the impact of our services within the community.

This year also brought change to our team as we said goodbye to two valued staff members. Their contributions have left a lasting impact, and we wish both Janet and Ian every success in their future endeavours.



PARTNERSHIPS



In early 2020, mental health-focused Third Sector organisations came together to ensure that access to their services was achievable through a single point of entry for clients.

This collaboration led to the creation of West Lothian Wellbeing, which for the past year has been hosted and managed by the Bridge Community Project on behalf of 22 partner organisations. The project continues to support over 100 clients annually, operating as a vital social prescription model for mental health services in the region.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Our former CEO, Alan, has stepped into a new role as our Business Development Manager. The focus of this role is to increase current income streams while also developing new income streams for the organisation.

The initial priority of the role is on securing additional funding streams to ensure the organisation's future. There will also be a focus on the usage of our Wellbeing Hub as well as exploring options around CPD training and Employee Wellbeing focused work.