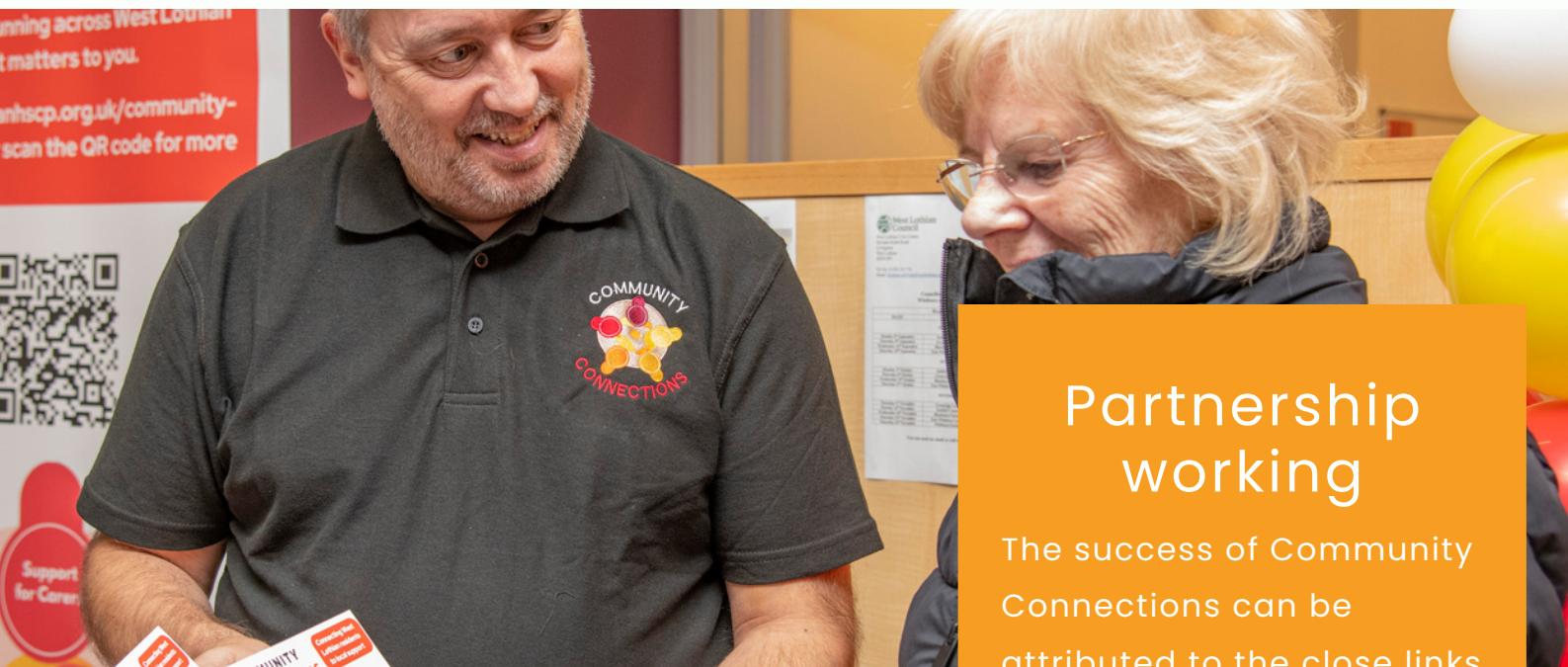


# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



## Partnership working

The success of Community Connections can be attributed to the close links established with existing community organisations

- Boghall Drop in Centre
- Craigsfarm
- Dale Hub
- Fauldhouse and Breich Valley Community Development Trust
- West Calder Hub

### One Year Later

Community Connections first two drop ins at Linlithgow and West Calder were introduced by West Lothian, Health and Social Care Partnership and West Lothian Council Anti-Poverty service in March 2022.

Created to address the demand from West Lothian residents to access face to face advice on health and social care within the heart of local communities in accessible spaces to support early intervention and promote self-management.

The service continued to grow with the help and assistance of the highly trained Community Connections Volunteers who support twelve local communities; Armadale, Blackburn, Boghall, Broxburn, Craigshill, East Calder, Fauldhouse, Linlithgow, Livingston North, Stoneyburn, West Calder, Whitburn and Winchburgh.

Community Connections has been able to highlight available alternative community sources of support to assist those managing long term health conditions such as asthma, arthritis, coronary heart disease,



Spring 2023

chronic pain disorders, COPD, Parkinson's Disease, Macular degeneration, MND, MS and strokes have been supported by Community Connections since the initial pilot stages.

Community Connections has provided assistance re-arranging hospital and vaccinations appointments, accessing carer support, applying for benefits, obtaining prescriptions and speaking with occupational therapy.

# ★ Spotlight ★ on MD

MD decided to volunteer with Community Connections to become more involved in his local community and to develop his knowledge and skills, originally from Bangladesh, MD moved to the UK in 2009 with his Aunt and and Uncle for university relocating to Scotland in 2014. MD is currently undertaking his PHD and combines studies, working and volunteering. MD was attracted to volunteering seeking a sense of community and people who share his passion for developing social policy for marginalised, easily ignored groups and the deprived.



Volunteering is a great opportunity to gain knowledge from those with lived experience, MD feels a little more at home, increasing his network and forming new contacts within the local area.

MD realised that to gain skills he would need to look at volunteering MD explains volunteering is a great platform for older groups to learn new skills which are not available to mature students, some graduate placements are limited to under twenty-fives. This has created the opportunity to pick and choose areas that he is interested in rather than a standard graduate training program. MD recognises through volunteering he is increasing his value for future employers.

**Community Connections  
volunteering positions are  
open to everyone interested.**



MD spends the majority of his volunteering time in his local community across a number of organisations: West Lothian Financial Inclusion Network, Scottish International Development Alliance, Kirknewton Listening Project, East Calder Community Council MD explains he gains personally working alongside fellow volunteers, each one has a unique experience and creates the opportunity to increase knowledge. Volunteering at Community Connections was a great way to learn core skills in doing so, he has the confidence not only to drive his dreams and ambition further but also to help and encourage those around him achieve their ambitions.

Volunteering has also made a positive impact on his mental health, as meeting like-minded people and working with a diverse group has given MD a greater sense of belonging within his own community. MD has been able to use his existing community links to encourage engagement with a broad range of organisations and persuade them to participate in Community Connections.

MD believes volunteering is not just great for the community, but also politically important at a national level. Its presence, expansion and community engagement are evidence of a real and active interest in using Community Connections.

The benefits of volunteering with Community Connection for MD has been far reaching. MD says it's great to be part of an organisation that is actively creating positive change within the community.

It's also a welcoming social environment. The team are friendly and compassionate, and happy to help volunteers with any query no matter how small.



### **Community Connections Conquests**

Provided assistance to change early morning appointment at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

Arranged for specialist prescription to be delivered to local pharmacy rather than hospital.

Assisted Service User initially looking for work nearer home to secure an interview and post with local company, apply for benefits, contact landlord to address arrears, access adaptations to property and offer space to a Ukrainian refugee.

Assisted Service User who is hard of hearing they was unable to speak to call centre or engage online to resolve ongoing home insurance company after flood.

Enabled Service User to make application to housing association to secure accommodation for them and their family and apply for Child Disability Benefit. Assisted visually impaired service user to complete Attendance Allowance Application.



### **Community Connections Collaborations**

Nahid Hanifs team at the Advice Shop continue to support Community Connections in Blackburn, Fauldhouse, Livingston North and Craigshill.

June Sloan at Access-2-Employment have made staff available to support the drop ins at Strathbrock, Blackburn, Boghall, Armadale, East Calder.

Alistair More's OT team at Strathbrock have taken over responsibility to support Community Connections drop in at Strathbrock.

Cameron Wilsons team have taken over responsibility for Dale drop in at Armadale Family Centre.

Caroline Johnston from Adult Learning Team will support Community Connections in Winchburgh, West Calder.

Home technology team is supporting Strathbrock and East Calder.



## Community Connections Conduits

More and more Community Organisations have been made aware of the benefits of Community Connections including; West Lothian Volunteer Network, Rosebury Centre, St Peters Foodbank, Visibility Scotland, Cycling without age, EARS Advocacy, District Nurses Forum, Whitburn Service Users Group, Third Sector Strategy Group.

Community Engagement is continuing across communities with the support of the Community regeneration officers.

Article will be shared in the latest issue of West Lothian Council Bulletin and the Mobility magazine.

## Pop-up hubs!



Bridgend Primary School, Change Grow Live and Braid Health all wish to hold a monthly drop ins.

Home technology team is supporting Strathbrock and East Calder throughout April and May raising awareness of technology available to support people within their homes.

## "CONSTRUCTIVE COMMUNICATIONS"

**Community Connections creates a safe space for people to come along and gain support within their local community to deal with a broad range of issues that otherwise they would have struggled to cope with.**

### Cyril and Camille

Cyril and Camille a married couple in their eighties, came along to Community Connections at the suggestion of their local Councillor. They were extremely upset they had been wrongly referred to a debt collection agency, due to a clerical error not recording the return of hired equipment, they couple had their receipt.

*"We can't thank Community Connection staff and volunteers enough for their help, I don't know what we would have done without them, no-one else was prepared to listen to what we were saying."*



They struggled to make themselves understood over the telephone and were wrongly accused of threatening behaviour when they advised if Sheriff's officers attending their home they should be wary of their dogs. The couple were understandably distressed and disclosed that they had many sleepless nights and were unable to eat they were so frightened by the threat of court action. The couple visited Community Connections across West Lothian on three subsequent occasions over the course of a week speaking with advisors and being reassured, until the situation was resolved to their satisfaction, including a written apology.

## Craig

Craig is in his late twenties, he popped into his local Community Connections drop in, the Bank had taken back £250 overpayment as soon as his DWP payment for £301.00 was credited to his account, with direct debits collected Craig was left a 9p balance for a fortnight, causing extreme financial hardship for him. Craig required urgent support. Craig has a range of challenges making communication difficult, the victim of an unprovoked attack left him with head injuries, hearing and balance issues, impacted by PTSD he is two years into recovery for pain killer dependency following the serious assault.

His injuries have impacted ability to deal with correspondence Craig was very anxious and overwhelmed, he has no family close by, he was managing to cope financially prior to this overpayment. Craig's condition impacts his ability to engage with call centres. Craig tried the Bank prior to attending, he call ended unsuccessfully.

Craig was supported to make another call to the Bank, he was supported while he was passed around various departments, explaining his financial circumstances and his health concerns. The situation was resolved, the Bank understood that his Benefits were his only source of income, they took note of his additional support needs and arranged for the money to be credited back, Craig was able to go into a branch to access his cash.

*"I couldn't understand what I was being told when I contacted the Bank first thing, the first person was great, but the next person was really difficult to hear what they were saying."*

*"If it hadn't been for Community Connections, being in the village at the right time and being able to speak to a person, I don't know how I would have managed, helping me and speaking to me all the time I was on hold."*

*"If I had been at home I would have ran out of phone credit and patience, it took three hours to get this sorted, I wouldn't have been able to sort this myself. I will definitely be back, it's so much easier speaking to someone in person."*

The Bank have agreed that for the next thirty days there will be a hold against the account, Craig will be supported in Branch to produce an income and expenditure and based on this make a repayment arrangement which will not cause additional financial or emotional distress.

## Carolyn

Carolyn came along to Community Connections initially looking to offer accommodation to Ukrainian refugees, during our chat Carolyn explained she would like to work nearer home, it was too expensive to travel with her car to her agency post in East Lothian.

Carolyn explained that agency work suits her better, she had disabilities which sometimes prevented her from working. Carolyn is currently waiting on a joint replacement, Carolyn didn't know she could apply for benefits, she was helped to make a benefit application.



*" I am thrilled with all the help and advice I got from Community Connections, I came in looking for information to host Ukrainian refugees, I left with a range of support from bathing aids to council tax benefits and hopefully a chance of a new job when I get my operation, I didn't know Community Connections existed, it's a great service."*



A referral was sent to occupation therapists, who arranged for additional banisters, grab rails and other aids to be fitted to Carolyn's home to allow her to access more easily.

Carolyn also explained she hadn't been working and had fallen behind on her council tax and rent payments. Caroline was supported to make single person Council Tax reduction and Housing

Benefit applications, we contacted her landlord to discuss a payment arrangement.

Carolyn lives alone and enjoys meeting people, she volunteers to avoid heating her home, Carolyn was interested in working with a local company, we helped Carolyn explain her disabilities to a local company who were recruiting and they were happy to take Carolyn's application, Carolyn will contact them following her joint replacement surgery.

## WHEN AND WHERE TO FIND US

The weekly drop in service is now established across West Lothian, creating an opportunity for anyone aged over sixteen to access face-to-face advice.

Drop-ins are available at:

- Armadale
- Blackburn
- Boghall
- Broxburn
- Craigshill
- East Calder
- Fauldhouse
- Linlithgow
- Livingston
- Stoneyburn
- West Calder
- Winchburgh
- Whitburn



Visit our website for times and locations.