

# LINKS Eyemouth



## Linking Ideas for Nourishment Knowledge and Support

Outside the Box began in 2004, to help people in communities create changes they wanted to see. We are a small, independent charity, working as a social enterprise. We support people to influence how things work, shape policies and services, and develop their own services and activities.

From individuals with good ideas and tiny community groups to big services and policy systems, we support anyone wanting to create positive, practical solutions to shared challenges.



**Linking Ideas for Nourishment  
Knowledge & Support**

LINKS Eyemouth is a project for families in the Eyemouth area in the Borders. The focus is round healthy, lower budget eating and wider wellbeing as a means of promoting social connections.

The project has helped strengthen community partnerships between different organisations, groups and small businesses, while sometimes making use of surplus food which would otherwise be wasted.

This project began as an offshoot of Eyemouth Healthy Living Network but has become an entity in its own right, supported by OTB and other partners.

Originally there were regular meetups, with social events centred around healthy eating. These involved families with young children, as well as older volunteers and grandparents, in various community settings.

Now, LINKS Eyemouth is a community-led project which connects families in Eyemouth and surrounding areas around healthy cooking and eating, saving energy and reducing household costs and staying well, physically and mentally. The project employs a local worker in Eyemouth and has local volunteers of all ages, including some schoolchildren, some retired people. It is based at various community venues, usually within Eyemouth but sometimes in other communities.

For many in Eyemouth, including new mums and New Scots people, the LINKS project introduces them to other people. Many original participants have gone on to volunteer or undertake training with LINKS. At least two participants gained qualifications which led to local employment.

LINKS is inclusive and diverse; it celebrates the rich mosaic of the Eyemouth community. Sharing food is a great way to form social connections.

Everyone involved is an equal, learning from one another and sharing ideas. With the support of partners, LINKS is able to support people to adapt recipes for cultural or dietary requirements, so that everyone is catered for.

The project seeks to support people to make social connections while learning about low-budget and nutritious cooking. It supports intergenerational relationships and skills development. It also addresses issues around waste or surplus food, uses local produce and low-carbon transport for local shopping and delivery via an e-cargo bike.

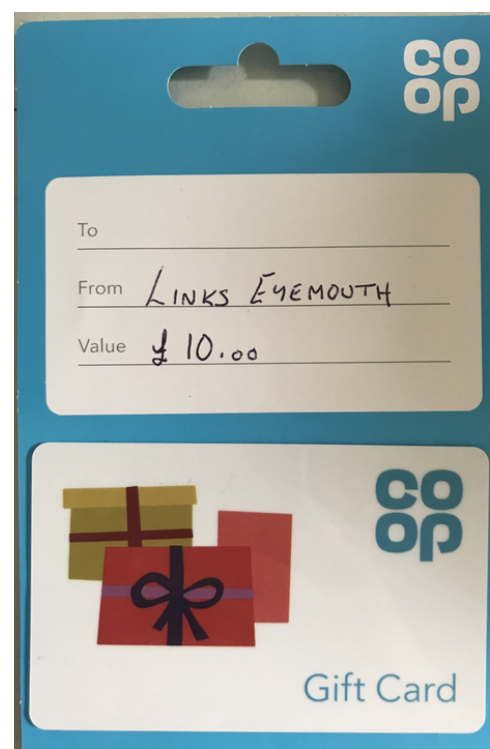
From delivering to a dozen families in the first weeks of Lockdown, now on average 50-60 families take part in recipe bags or other events. Some families have stopped using the food bank as they prefer the positive social element of the LINKS model.



Although LINKS originally began as a small NHS-led pilot project for local mums, it was soon evident that there was a demand for it to continue. Local parents wanted to learn about ways of catering for their families, even when on a low budget. They appreciated learning tips for dealing with fussy eaters, different ages and stages, or special dietary requirements. They also enjoyed the social connections they made. Their children had a chance to play with other children while the parents had informal peer support.

LINKS has also been helping reduce the impact of the cost of living crisis by providing families with free healthy food without a stigma attached. It equips people with sustainable skills to address the cost of living crisis, as they learn about using surplus or leftover food, economising on cooking costs and general energy efficiency. It provides people with life and employability skills, experience and volunteering opportunities. Some of them go on to find opportunities in the area, rather than having to move away.

This summer we were delighted to be able to provide 55 families in Eyemouth with tickets to East Links Farm Park thanks to funders, Children and Young People Planning Partnership. The free tickets also came with a £10 Co-op picnic voucher to enable families to buy the food that suits their requirements or any restrictions.



## Climate crisis

Last winter we were hearing from people who were concerned about the cost of living crisis and worried about climate change. Eyemouth was hard-hit by storms the previous year and was cut off for days with lack of food and supplies. Families wanted to do something about the environment and not feel helpless.

LINKS has been supporting people to feel they are playing their small part in reducing carbon emissions: using local food, surplus food and now having an e-cargo bike for local deliveries.

We were even able to coordinate a series of sessions to support people to look at ways of cutting their carbon emissions, saving energy and cooking on a budget. We also ran upcycling sessions and slow cooking sessions. Local people told us what they wanted to do, and we delivered sessions to suit.



## Cost of living crisis

The cost of living crisis affected many Eyemouth families, and last winter saw many more families joining the LINKS project. Several were working families, who were still struggling to pay basic household bills.

For the Christmas recipe bag, a record 100 bags were delivered. These also went to the wider community, via partners including Community Larders in outlying areas.

Many families are struggling and are looking for ways to eat well while saving money and energy. With rising bills, even being out of the house for a few hours supports these families to reduce their energy bills. The project and sessions are a celebration of cooking and sharing good food and nobody feels any stigma around accepting free food.



## Activities

LINKS Eyemouth has recently been running 'Big Cook Little Cook' sessions fortnightly with families with pre-school children. In partnership with Joint Health Improvement Team and Eyemouth Early Years, the sessions take place at the Community Centre in Eyemouth. Each session families come together and take part to make a delicious, healthy recipe, with participants even travelling from as far as Kelso. People have been telling us that there is a gap, and that there is nothing like this offered in other places in the Borders.

Now we have been asked by some people to run sessions with parents and school-aged children/teens. Having run successful slow cooking sessions elsewhere, we appreciate how much children and their parents can benefit from working together to learn simple cooking skills, at the same time building social skills and developing peer support. We hope to secure funding to run this.

In 2022 with National Lottery funding we were able to purchase an e-cargo-bike for the project.

The bike will be used for deliveries of food and it can reach as far as some of the Drone Hill area without recharging, which is great news!



We have been successful in receiving a grant from the Drone Hill Wind Farm Community Benefit Fund, administered by Foundation Scotland. This grant is to support the delivery of a community health and well-being programme in and around Eyemouth for the next 12 months. The fund recognised the breadth of activities that our LINKS project has undertaken and the importance of this work during the cost of living crisis.

Earlier this year LINKS, with partner Abundant Borders, hosted Food Hygiene Level Two for local people with Scottish Government CLLD funding. The course resulted in one of the women securing local employment. She attended the course in March and had secured employment by July.

At Christmas we linked in with Berwickshire Housing Association to provide hampers in the Duns area; people who received the hampers told us they would not normally be able to afford traditional butcher's turkey. They were then able to spend on other costs at what was a difficult time for many – even working families.

Through Berwickshire Swap (of which one of our volunteers was a founding member) we are hearing there is more demand for recycled clothing as more families are hit by the cost of living crisis.

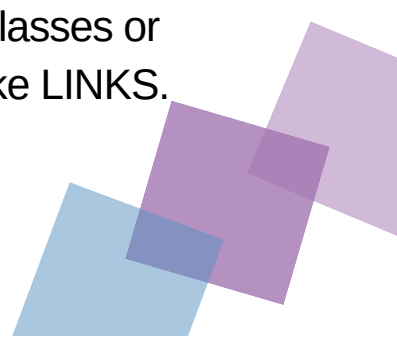
Last year we delivered cooking sessions to adults with learning difficulties in partnership with Field to Fork; they told us:

“The cooking session was particularly helpful for our more independent members who have been encouraged to continue making healthy, seasonal soups at home. We have also purchased a soup maker and on alternate weeks, we now make a pot of soup together during our sessions, which we enjoy for lunch.”

This year we worked with Duns Primary School and supported them with their EcoWeek and their community slow cooking project, providing hands-on delivery as well as supplying slow cookers for the school. The school is directly linked in with families who are most in need of support; the cooking programme reached these families. Feedback has been that the sessions helped families to connect, to learn skills and to enjoy good food together. They would like more of these opportunities.

Last year we held a series of energy fairs in Duns and other small villages with partners Greener Duns and Changeworks. The people we spoke to had general concerns about the cost of living, their inability to heat their homes, the reliance on fossil fuels and the cost of cooking.

They were keen to learn tips for saving energy, whether by insulating their homes or ways to save on cooking costs. Several people told us they would be interested in taking part in community cooking classes or having recipe bags like LINKS.



In March, Outside the Box hosted a parliamentary reception in the Scottish Parliament and invited MSPs, Councillors, community members and members of various charities along to meet, and hear people speak about their connections with the charity. Our LINKS project worker and one of the LINKS volunteers came along and were able to chat to MSPs about their work in and around Eyemouth and the impact it has had on the community.



The project has had increased interest from MSPs, MPs and other organisation over the last few months.

The LINKS project will continue to evolve and develop over the next 5 years according to what the community would like, forming new partnerships, using co-production and delivering new initiatives to meet demand. We also have plans to take the learning from LINKS and support people in other communities to develop their own version of the project. We have already had several approaches from various communities (in the Borders and beyond) who would like to do this.



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