5 years Project, co-created by the over 60's, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund

Connects2Project

"Helping you to help yourself"

"Connects2Project is my anti-depressant!"

Positive individual and group activities:-

- to improve physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.
- to make new friends, support and inspire each other.
- to combat isolation and help you cope better with every day life.
- to work through life issues in a welcoming and supportive space.

...And providing volunteering opportunities to share your skills and talents with your peers.

John Galloway took this photo of us in 2011, way back in the beginning of, Connects, time!!! Woah... little did we know back then about what a pleasure and a privilege working for the over 60's in our community was going to be…years of bingo and the slosh? ...far from it…! Hopefully this book goes some way in capturing and sharing the good times and not so good times that we were lucky enough to grow with each other through Connects Project and then Connects2Project..

Content Page

Introduction

Positive Activities– developing and practising "The Arts of Wellbeing"
all classes based in the Annexe

- Slow and Gentle Yoga, Grow Stronger Live Longer and Wellbeing Yoga Plus
- Partick Pluckers– Ukulele group
- Margaret Thomson Talent Showcase
- Our "Lightbulbs"- band of merry, much appreciated, volunteers
- Introduction to Knit and Natter– too much to capture here so they merit their very own book which is to follow! :) x
- Flower arranging
- Health Walks
- Gentle Exercise
- Art Classes– Beginners and Intermediates.
- Creative Writing– short story– The day we went to Luss, Oh."
- Time Capsule
- The Men's Group
- Circle Social Dancing
- Stained Glass Class
- Sing Along Choir
- Twinkle Toes
- Group Meditation
- Positive Living Class
- Blanket Stitch Up
- Complementary Therapies
- Halloween and Themed Lunch Clubs
- Amazing Globe trotting Grace
- Glasgow Print Studio comes to Annexe
- Then we visit Glasgow Print Studio
- Another Content Page– this time out and about!

Wow, will be 9 years funding all in, 5 years funding for Connects2Project from the Big Lottery, now known as the National Lottery Community Fund, for the over 60's based here in Partick, Glasgow, Scotland. We had, way back, completed a 3 years NHS contract in Townhead, Knightswood and Netherton where it had become very apparent that there were many folk over 60 years old who were needing a bit of support, love and listened to. Many caring for a partner or family member with no support or time for themselves, running themselves into the ground… As if they had been watching over our shoulders The Big Lottery Scotland came out with a fund that was perfect to take this work forwards into working out together what we could all do to help each other. 3 years of the initial Connects Project taught us, big time, that our "hello, how can we help?" mantle, actually in many cases, backfired a bit and disempowered people, the exact opposite of what we intended! A year in between of change for our funder but they still kept it all going into our 5 years Connects2Project with the new mantle of how can we "help you to help yourself!" This book will focus on the last 5 years-Connects2Project– but will include seeds of ideas, inspiration, volunteering of folks skills and talents—the ground that Connects2Project grew from. Not all has been a bed of roses, we have been through many ups and downs along the way! Challenges, learning, talking and listening, friendships lost and found, family issues shared and steps taken to heal, physical, mental and emotional times to work on and through, skills and talents to be encouraged into classes and activities for peers to enjoy and blossom, health scares and battles overcome, good laughs and hard losses, inspirational stories and heart breaking news, networks of support for each other developed and personality clashes worked through and resolved. New skills were learned, positive living encouraged to counteract or balance off addictions, anxiety, depression and worry, long held dreams and aspirations realised, supporting each other in, and through, times of need or grieving the loss of a loved one, supporting the balancing of caring responsibilities for others whilst keeping self sane ...So…. Basically... All of life's rich tapestry was woven together by everyone into their community led project. Powerful-By the community for the community. All washed down with, 1000s of, good strong cups of tea! Massive respect!!! As we said before a real privilege and pleasure…. Pictured here are Betty and Brenda– two of our community that sadly are no longer with us but their essence, stories and lives are still woven in with ours ...

Welcome to our activities that we co-created for our own selves and to share with our peers! :) x

Anne K would have gone into politics if her lungs hadn't been ruined through smoking. Her legacy was if she could just stop one person starting smoking…!!!

Robbie was to be evacuated, by boat, to Canada during the war and at the 11th hour her Aunt said she could stay here with her instead. The boat was later bombed on its way to Canada...

Love how much the beneficiaries quickly slotted themselves right into all the fun and games. RIP Robbie Cullen and Anne Kilpatrick xx

Dreams come true! Irene wrote her book of poems :) x

“The Yoga class has taught me to respect my body more and I now look after myself more than normal.”

Feel a lot better about myself. Can handle things better

“I feel less depressed.”

The benefits for me are exceptional– Increased mobility, reduction in stress levels, meeting new people in my own age group and one hour of “me “ time —-what more can I say!”

“Whole outlook on life changes for the better. Rely on my own judgement.”

“Encourages maintaining current activities and trying new things”

“Makes you feel confident about the future.”

“Class has helped me a lot with coping with my arthritis.”

“I think everyone should be aware about Yoga and use it, as it can help you to cope with a lot of aspects in your life which stress you out!”

Partick Pluckers the legacy of the late Margaret S Thomson (1929-2013) who, whilst entertaining us all at a Christmas show, said that she had always wanted to run a ukulele group and by the next January her dream became a reality and the Partick Pluckers were born!!!

Margaret had invented a colour coded way to make it easier for folk to learn the chords . Her inspiration and legacy continues on to this day with Michele and Angie at the helm of the Partick Pluckers class and the yearly Margaret Thomson Talent Showcase. Many have benefitted from this class over the years! :) "You are my sunshine" was Margaret's favourite song!!! :) x

“Best start to your week ever. Partick Pluckers is so much fun. Thank you!” :) x

**“It has been an achievement,
I never thought I would play a musical instrument at 67!”**

**“Coming to Partick Pluckers makes me feel younger, every night
I play my ukulele. I have sacked the TV! My life has totally changed,
want to live now, my depression has gone.”**

Showcasing and supporting a great day had by all at Partick Burgh

Partick Pluckers entertaining the troops at Erskine Home for Veterans and at Active Seniors in Victoria Park.

Partick Plucker Theme Tune-
by Stuart to the tune of:-
"My Old Man's a Dustman."

"We are the Partick Pluckers,
a ukulele band.
We play on Monday mornings,
our group is really grand.
Although we're old and past it,
our tunes are mainly new.
While some are nice and easy,
some are hard to do.
Michele is our leader,
and tells us what to play.
Supplies us with the music,
a new tune every day.
Angie sings with gusto,
and helps us all along.
We try so hard to keep in time,
but sometimes get it wrong.
I love the Partick Pluckers,
a lovely friendly bunch.
We strum our ukuleles,
and then go home for lunch."

- written by Stuart during the 2016 Margaret T. Talent Showcase!

Margaret Thomson Talent Showcase

"To do something I initially felt resistance to but see the need of it. It benefits me to do something that really helps people(TT), to feel their thanks and appreciation makes absolute sense. I enjoy the contact".

So many thanks to the "Lightbulbs" our amazing group of volunteers for their 1000's of hours of supporting the smooth running of many of the activities on offer in the Annexe for their peers. Your skills, talents, energy and thyme are very much appreciated. Thank you!!! :) x

Introduction to Knit and natter– hand knitted with love, sent out to Glasgow, Scotland and the 7 continents of the world! Amazing!!!

Quote from Australia:- "God Bless the Scots"

"Thanks very much for your kindness and thanks also to the many wonderful knitters"

From the early days of Knit and natter right through..

…. to world domination with “Operation Penguin”…..

...far too much to summarise in a few pages so…,

.the whole world dominating, hand knitted with love, story of the Knit and Natter group, so well deserves and warrants its own book!!! :) x

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

...so watch this space for "Knit and Natter, The Movie!"

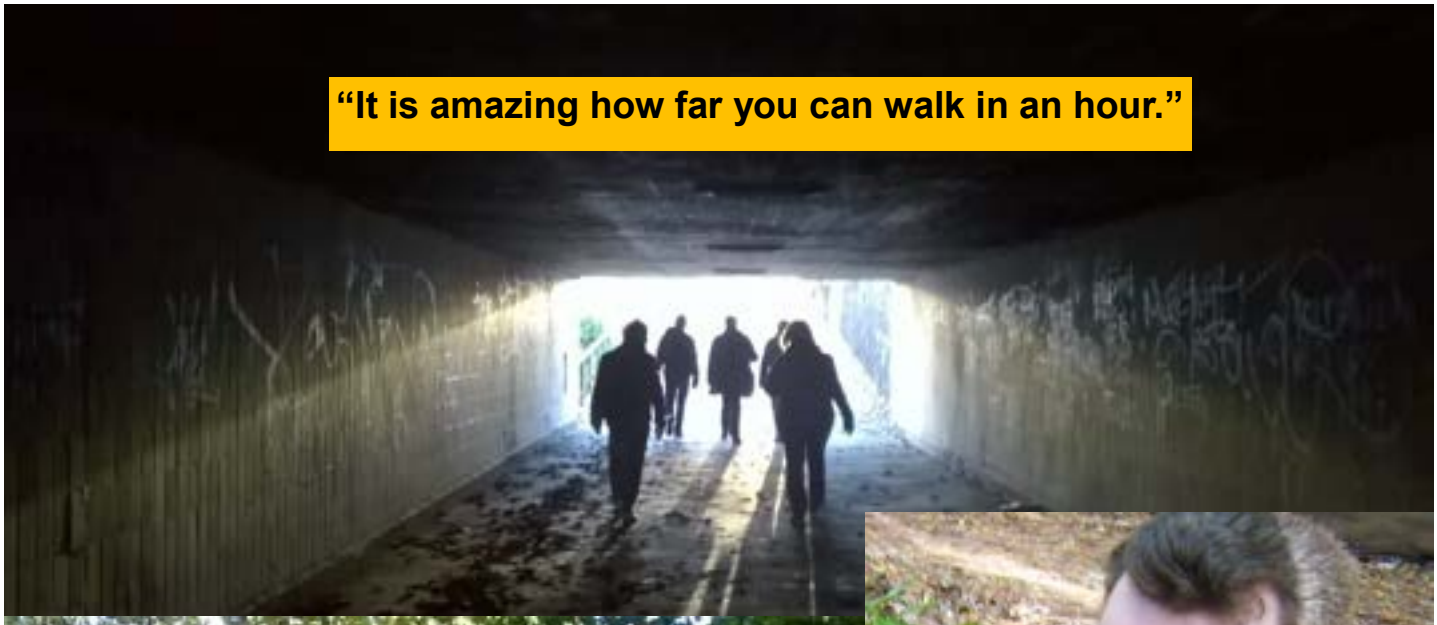
Thank you so much, to Jane for her "blooming marvellous" flower arranging classes and lovingly hosting a Dementia Cafe 2015/16 :) x

"It's been a long time since I enjoyed myself so much!"

Joe receives his so well deserved certificate for his services towards years of Health walks!

Worked for, University Café ice cream, on the one very hot day we get a year! :) x

Health walks a blooming marvellous!



“It is amazing how far you can walk in an hour.”

RIP Ross, one of our original walkers, way back when the Health Walks started in 2006. He suggested Monday ‘s 11am morning walks to start his week off in a positive way. :) x

“In every walk with Nature one receives far more than he seeks.”-John Muir for sure John Muir!– we once met Hollywood star Ryan Gosling on a walk– all be it a cardboard cut-out -still very healthy for your heart! :) x

Health walk over on the wee ferry to visit the Govan Stones

Health walks keep you young at heart!

Mopping the decks on the Tall Ship!

Gentle Exercise Class with our Bob.

"Maintains flexibility of all joints and muscles and helps with back/ spine issues. Helps ease arthritic in my hands and wrists."

"Now do the Tai Chi at home nearly every day so sleep has improved."

"I learned to focus on the present moment."

"The exercises and warm atmosphere help to maintain both pain free mobility and a cheerful mind and so adds to my quality of life."

“I have met a great many people who are like minded and gained confidence in talking to others and avoiding isolation .”

“Has made me more keen to try things and has made me less anxious about facing up to things.”

“Happy times at the class help me cope with family difficulties. A BIG help. Depressions kept under control without medication. So good!”

“Confidence, in a nourishing atmosphere, increases! This has a knock on effect. Great.”

“I am now more confident in putting colour on the paper.”

“I feel good after drawing or painting.”

“It is a good feeling to have been creative.”

"I have enjoyed this class so much. A smashing tutor, a very friendly group of members and a lovely place to meet."

"It is so fulfilling to see something that I have created."

"I feel relaxed and engrossed in my art. I forget about my problems."

"I have been more self-reliant since coming to this class. It has made me cope better with things in life."

"To plan a couple of hours weekly for one's own soul self is a statement about the importance of caring for one's own self."

"This class is worth its weight in gold! Jenny is to be treasured!"

Short story by volunteer Lesley who ran our Creative Writing Class

THE DAY WE WENT TO LUSS – OH!

By L.P. Lyon

"A bus trip organised for all the people who used the Annexe. All the walkers, the knitters, the artists, the singers, the ukulele players (Partick Pluckers), the therapy ladies and the wonderful people in the office, all welcome to get on the bus to Luss. I hadn't been to Luss for oooh more than forty years, so decided I would join in the fun, get on the coach and head for Loch Lomond – hopefully by the low road. Every now and again I have the need to be '...doon by the watter', and this seemed the perfect opportunity to get my feet wet.

The day came, and it was a fine sunny day with hardly a cloud in the sky. I took my own camping chair (I can't sit on the ground nowadays), and with my ukulele and my lunch in my bag I set off for Partick to meet with all of those going on the trip. Eventually the bus came and everyone piled on grabbing a seat by the window and keeping the other one for their friend. I was happy to sit quite far back. Margaret counted heads, then counted again, and made sure we were belted up - 'it's the law!'

The journey was interesting, going far to the west of where I was used to. I didn't recognise any of the places we passed, and soon we were drawing into the parking area, getting our last minute announcements about toilets, coffee places and estimated time of departure. I followed the crowd and lo, there in front of me was the sparkling, rippling water of Loch Lomond, just begging for people to get their feet wet.

Angie and Michelle quickly found a place big enough to keep all of us together, and the blankets and chairs were set out, along with huge bags of – well, I didn't know what, till they were opened and funny hats were distributed, along with bubble blowers, leis made of paper flowers and other accoutrements, all to make the day more fun. Some of the group set off to walk along a newly developed Fairy Walk – they said it was lovely, while others made a bee-line for toilets and the coffee shop. There were lots of cars parked, but there seemed to be plenty of room for everyone both in the village and around the water's edge. There was a motor launch that would take you along the loch, and some people paddled canoes which soon became a spot on the water, but I just sat where I had planted my chair and enjoyed watching all the comings and goings.

HORSE
MEAT

I had my large-brimmed straw hat to protect my eyes, I had water to drink and even a newspaper which I borrowed – absolute BLISS.
There were a few mothers with very small children, encouraging them to get their feet in the water without much success in some cases. As we were all enjoying the lovely sunny day, there was a hush. …
Everyone turned to watch the tall bronzed Adonis who came through the trees, wearing nothing more than the smallest of lime-green trunks and carrying a plastic bucket. He was obviously a body-builder with sculpted muscles in legs and arms, and (what I later learned is called) a six-pack abdomen. We watched as he went to the water's edge and bent down (wwhhheeewww!) to fill the bucket. Without any acknowledgement, he strode back through the trees and left us all gasping and laughing at what we had just seen. Five Minutes Later He Was Back! Complete with plastic bucket and the same muscly physique. Ah but this time he didn't get away so easily. Some of the ladies called out, Jane scurried to get her camera but he was off through the trees again. He came back again, and then again, and by this time we were bold enough to ask what he was doing with the water. Was there a fire back there and he was trying to put it out? No, nothing like that. He was filling his child's plastic pool. We'd all got quite chummy by now, and he agreed to pose with us, and somewhere there's a lovely photograph of him holding Angie and me on his arms….
Now we were all ready for a sing-song. Michelle and Angie tuned up their ukes, I took mine out of the case, but handed it over to someone else to play, I just wanted to sing quietly and enjoy the fun. The camera was clicking merrily by now, and all the dancers and singers and paddlers were asked to '...stand still!'. We'd all eaten our picnic, drunk all the water, and paddled till we were called to gather our bits and pieces, it was time to go home.
All the garbage was put in the proper bin, nothing and no-one was left behind, the driver of the bus agreed to let some of us off at a point near our own area, and we came home, tired but happy.
What a lovely day we had at Luss in July 2018.

Remember, remember the 5th of November!? Connects time capsule is buried under the Annexe and is to be opened in 2112...7 years gone only 93 to go! Capsule contains us all and what we all were doing for ourselves, each other and our community. Loads of photos, the group shot below being the last item to be included. In 2012 we were marking and celebrating the Burgh of Partick being part of the city of Glasgow for 100 years! 1912-2012. Sandra White MSP unveiled the plaque you can see at the Annexe entrance! :) x

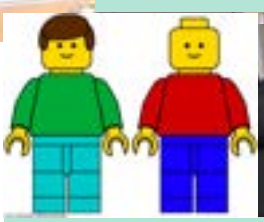
The infamous Men's Group meeting up Tuesdays 2pm-4pm

"Definitely my mental health has improved. I felt so isolated and lonely before I got involved with the Annexe"

RIP John Galloway who volunteered for years in the Annexe with the Men's Group, Photos are Fun, Alcohol Awareness, as a Board Member and taught us all how to frame a good photograph. Thanks John!

Cooking up a carry on!" :)

"I do this for the sense of community. We've all benefited from the mutual support".



Exhibiting in the National Library for Scotland.

Learning about artefacts older than themselves!

" I am so pleased that you have all enjoyed working with us at Glasgow Museums. We have enjoyed it immensely too, and are delighted with the display – thank you!

Sharing stories and themes of interest.

Circle Social Dancing Class central at any celebration. Here saying thank you and good bye to the Milligan Hall….

...and dancing at the Margaret Thomson Talent Showcase….

"My mobility and co-ordination has been enhanced with this group."

Uplifting and inspiring, look forwards to the class every week.

"Wonderful supporting group."

"Good for my balance."

"Met so many lovely people, they have had a dramatic effect on my life."

"I always go away feeling more happy in myself."

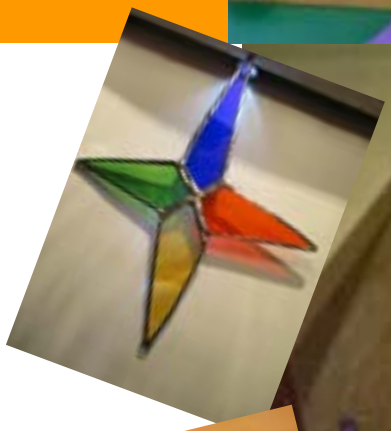
Designing, cutting, grinding, copper wiring, fluxing, soldering, creating, enjoyment, satisfaction, great fun company, supportive, encouraging amazing sense of accomplishment very inspiring!!! :) x

Smashing time had by all on a Monday nights at Stained Glass Class

“Great to get this opportunity to create.”

"I love this class. I love fluxing!"

Big Thank you to Raymond's Stained Glass Class volunteers who support and inspire the creativity of the class no end. Total stained glass stars!!



"I really enjoy seeing the pleasure that people get from creating something beautiful."

Front right...Sitting here proudly window designer David “Steve” Stevenson who sadly passed away recently. R.I.P Steve

Hands up if you love singing and want a sing along choir!?

"I have COPD and asthma, but the singing and the warm up exercises greatly helps my breathing."

"It takes away my depression which in turn gives me confidence to take on any challenges."

"Has helped me to feel confident in my own judgements."

Spreading love, joy and happiness wherever they roam!
Good work Choir!!! :) x

"This choir has helped me enormously in lots of ways. Helps you to feel loved and to belong to something strong."

NHS training to become a Twinkle Toe– personal foot care volunteer

Twinkle Toes dedicated NHS trained volunteers. Massive respect and thank you for continued support of this much needed service. Over 200 local and not so local people are benefeeting. Great work!!! :) x

"This is the best service in the world, really!"

"That's me off to the dancing!"

"This is amazing. I wish there were more organisations like you who are willing to facilitate the programme like you do. "
- NHS Positively Podiatry

"Here, I will be able to climb a Munro now."

"Great service, great value, thank you"

Twinkle Toes was nominated for the NHSGGC Chairman's Awards

"My stress has gone, my pain has gone, If the NHS could bottle this they would save a fortune."

Group Meditation Class
Fridays 11am-12pm

All Welcome!!! :) x

"The class is very valuable. It teaches people to be reasonable and calmer in daily life

"Time to relax– forget problems and become optimistic– in company with others is calming and reassuring."

"My stress has gone, my pain has gone.
If the NHS could bottle this they would save a fortune."
- Meditation Class 7/10/16

“Makes me realise I can take responsibility to relax myself and be responsible for my own health and wellbeing.”

“I am kinder to myself.”

“The relaxation is wonderful. I feel less stressed.”

“It makes me feel more positive about myself. It has a very good affect on my self-reliance.”

“Makes me more at ease and able to cope. I feel able to cope with most things now.”

“I feel a lot happier and glad that I have meditation on my side as an aid throughout what life has to offer or throw your way.”

“Something I can use anytime to help centre myself and think straight.”

“This class lessens procrastination and stimulates “get up and go.”

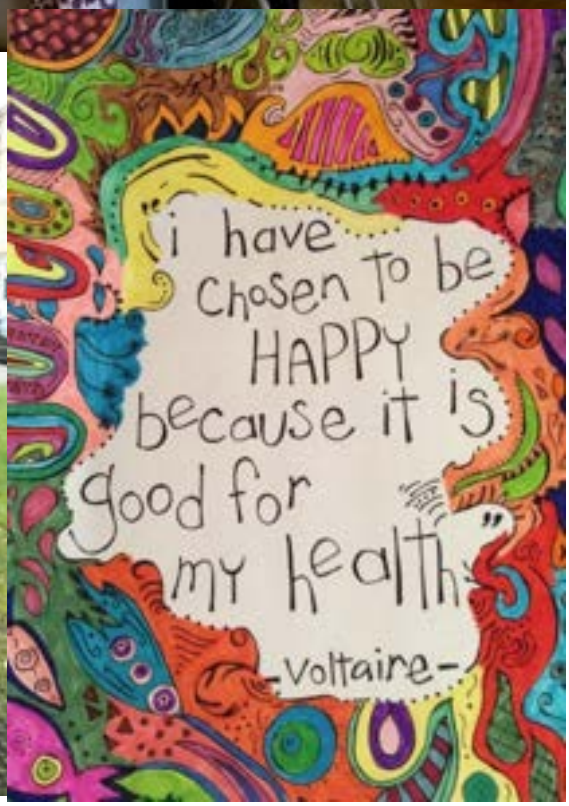
“I have more confidence in the future.”

"Felt very fearful when I first came here. Now I feel I am able to cope, move on from where I was, look forward and do the things I was fearful about."

"This class has helped me learn to trust people again, you can't buy that."

"I have become less serious and learnt how to live in the moment."

"I could write a book about what this Annexe has done for me."



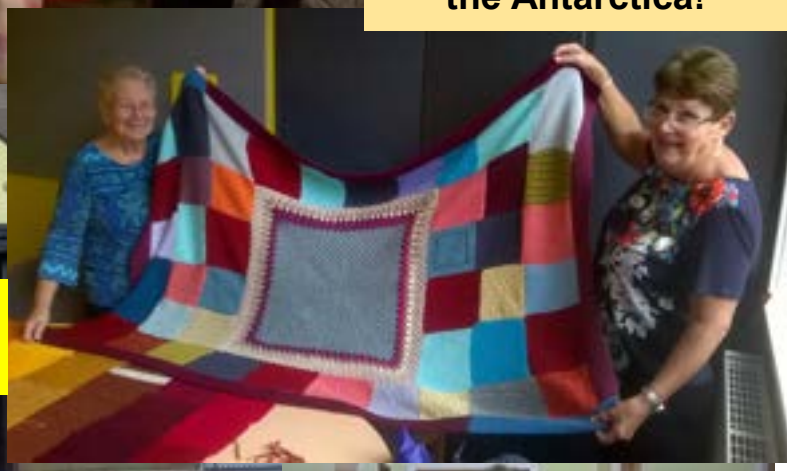
“This class has allowed me to be frank about <u>my</u> needs.”

“Thursday morning positive thinking– I want to thank everyone for the support I have had. I came to the class never thinking how I would need the help you have all given me.”

“Reminds me to help my health with handy tips.”

“I’d be lost without you guys.”

Some Hand knitted with love stitch up blankets going off to new homes for Turning Point and Hamish Allan Centre for Glasgow Homeless and others off to keep penguin conservation workers warm in the Antarctica!



All the blankets are given their own names and labels sewn on !

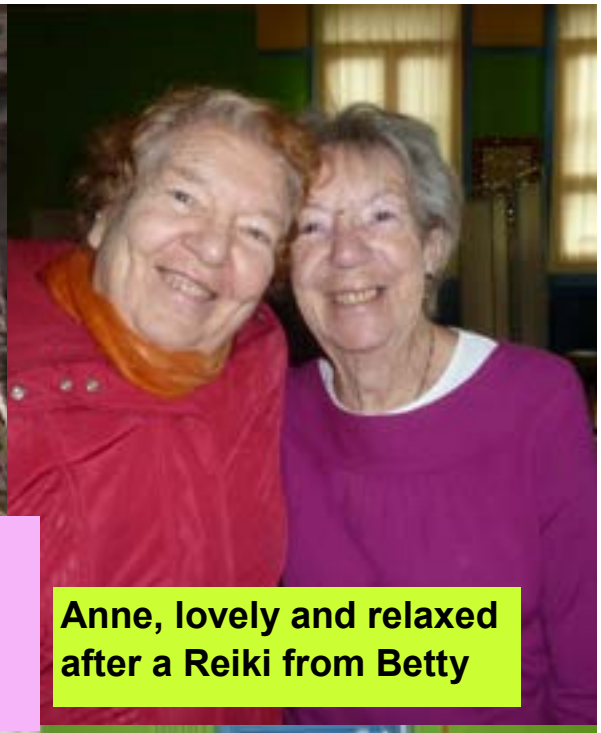
Magic work to everyone who knits the squares and helps the stitch up group.!!!!
A special mention and a Big thank you has to go to our Sandra Jackson for her, above and beyond behind the scenes, homework and love she puts into these blankets x

Team work!!!– Jeanette knits her squares, Val from Drumchapel sews them together then May crochets the borders then Sandra takes them back to Val to give away to a good home!!!

9 blankets sent to single Mums in Tanzania.

Thank you so much to Grace and Moira for years, and 100s, of relaxation sessions for our local community. Namaste :) x
"Lovely, perfect, just what the Doctor ordered."
"That Reiki was so relaxing I could get that 24/7."
"You come in hobbling and you leave with a wee spring in your step."
"Made me think I need to get reflexology done on a regular basis. It heals you."
"It took the pain in my sinus away!" IHM

James McGee's (1967-2007) legacy:-
introducing Reiki and Indian Head Massage
to the Annexe.
R.I.P James



Anne, lovely and relaxed after a Reiki from Betty

Reiki training classes

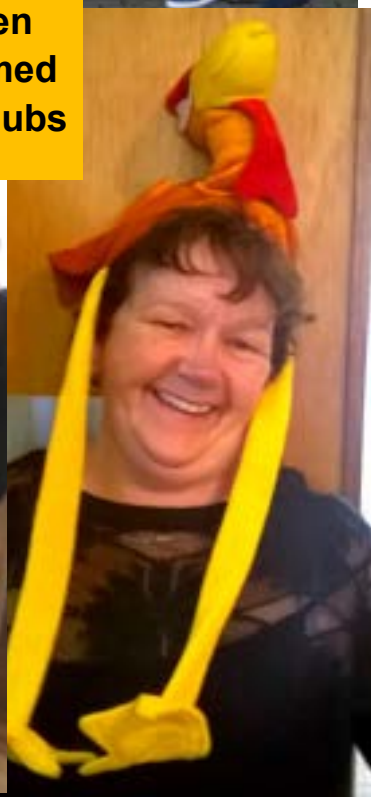
Thank you Angie, Emma and Katie!

Thanks to Becks and Emma who started off volunteering in Townhead- way back in the day!

Good times!
xxx

Halloween and themed Lunch clubs

First Lunch Club!



BURNING bright productions

Bright Productions London emailed us looking for someone who has never been abroad before to star in the Sky TV programme of "50 ways to kill your Mammies" Out of 420 hopefuls our Grace won!!! :) x

SHE has spent a night in the Amazon rainforest, swum with sharks and joined police in Peru on a dangerous drugs bust – but it's all in a day's work for 73-year-old Grace Sergeant.

Throw in hunting wild animals, speeding down Dubai's longest water slide at 80mph and walking around Canada's CN Tower, not to mention paragliding and camping in the desert.

It's a remarkable list for the pensioner, who hadn't left Scotland until she was invited to appear on the TV show 50 Ways to Kill Your Mammies.

Grace travels to Dubai, Canada and Peru to star alongside comedian Ruth Adamacy and proves age is no barrier as she goes from one adrenaline rush to the next.

She said: "I never thought at my age that I would be risking my life to complete a list of crazy challenges.

"But it's the best thing

Fearless Scot desert, went o

AMANDA KEENAN

I've ever done and pushed me out of my comfort zone. Most of the trials were pretty scary but it was better than sitting at home doing nothing."

Grace decided to apply for the programme – which features four new mammies joining Ruth and his mum Nancy on their travels – after hearing about it at her local community centre.

She said: "It was such an unexpected opportunity and at first I was quite sceptical.

"I went home and emailed the production team and thought it would never come to anything. But a few days later I was invited to London to meet Ruth and Nancy.

"We hit it off straight away and I was invited to Dubai to film."

Grace, from Pollokshields, Glasgow, was treated to a VIP stay at the luxurious Atlantis The Palm Hotel and admits enjoy doing so the

Grace then got to, not only, travel abroad but had to take part in many dare devil stunts including climbing the dizzy highs of CN Tower Toronto, police drugs raid in Peru and scuba diving– even though she couldn't swim in Dubai to name a few! Amazing, Grace!!! x

Print making the Knit and natter sign! :) x

“Making your Mark” printing workshops with Glasgow Print Studio

Connects2Project Activities out with the Annexe and in partnership with other local organisations

- **Kelvingrove Bowling, National Library of Scotland and Art Galleries**
- **Our trips doon the water to Largs on the Waverley**
- **Bus trips to Luss, Falkirk Wheel, The Kelpies**
- **Branching Out– in Partnership with "Operation Play Outdoors"**
- **Intergenerational Activities with Hyndland After School Club**
- **Glasgow Science Centre and visit, with them, to Whiteless Windfarm**
- **Partnership working with Partick Housing Association**
- **Social Isolation and Loneliness in Scotland -research visit from Professor Jeanette Trauth an Associate Professor in Behavioural & Community Health Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh**
- **Summary of Connects2Project**
- **Connects2Project end of Project Fiesta Forever Party**
- **Letter of recognition from Sandra White MSP**

Connects2Project out and about making the most of our free local attractions–
Art Galleries for their lunchtime Organ recitals, Library of Scotland for their fascinating archives and old films and outdoor Bowling on Kelvingrove Greens.

Doon the water on the Waverley first year dressed as Sailors and with Captain hats on, year 2 as Pirates and year 3 as Vikings– only to land at Largs nearly 750 years– to the day– of the commemoration of the invasion of Largs by the actual Vikings! You couldn't make this stuff up!!! ;) x

GSPC

Birthday Bear visits the Kelpies too!

Branching Out with "Operation Play Outdoor"

"Helped me feel calm and relaxed and has seeped into the rest of my week."

"Loved the fresh air and interaction with new people."

Crafts and Conservation activities outdoors in the fresh air!!! :) x

Working towards our John Muir awards

"I've loved every minute, makes me feel human! So many people out of touch with nature."

Sharing intergenerational activities with the kids from Hyndland After School Club– sewing, crafts, baking, gardening at the allotment and knitting with our Knit and natter group. HASC also, kindly, shared their coaches for all of us to go on trips to Ardrossan Beach, Culzean Castle, Calderglen and Finlaystone Country Parks and Luss.

Culzean Castle and spectacular grounds– well worth a visit— even in the rain!

Pool exploring at Calderglen Country Park

The kids taught us the floss at Luss and we all sang you “Canny shove your granny off a bus” on the coach on the way back home – great day. Thank you so much for sharing your coaches HASC!!! :) x

Bodyworks from Science Centre and visit to Whitelees Windfarm

Partnership working with Partick Housing Association brought funding in for our film clubs, health and arts activities and fun and dancing at PHA's Festive Tea dance at Partick Burgh Halls! :) x

Social Isolation and Loneliness in Scotland -research visit from Professor Jeanette Trauth an Associate Professor in Behavioural & Community Health Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh. The purpose of her trip was to inform a doctoral seminar which addresses various social determinants of health. Jeanette was struck by the way policy makers nationally and locally are addressing his issue in Scotland and by the work being delivered with communities. She was able to visit a number of funded projects and recently sent us this report featuring our Knit and Natter group!

"When the average American thinks about their health or what it means to be healthy, it is frequently in terms of "not being sick or having anything wrong with them". Although this approach to health, characterized as a "medical model" has dominated our thinking for most of the 20th century, competing models of health have emerged in the latter part of the 20th and into the 21st centuries. In 1948, The World Health Organization defined health as "*a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.*" This more holistic approach to thinking about health continues to evolve and with it, new questions emerge such as how can we promote healthy social and physical environments for all individuals in today's complex society. For example, how do societies grapple with the growing health problem of social isolation and loneliness that is affecting the populations of many developed countries globally? Recent research has shown that the effect of loneliness and social isolation can be as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes per day and is more damaging than obesity!

This past spring I received a Course Development Grant from the UCIS European Studies Centre, to travel to the UK to research this issue. The goal of this trip was to learn how policy makers, health researchers and community members in Scotland and England—who have been at the forefront of this issue-- are addressing this issue, and then apply what I learned to revise an existing doctoral seminar that I lead at Pitt Public Health that addresses various social determinants of health.

After spending three weeks in the UK—primarily in Scotland—I was struck by two things regarding how this country approaches the issues of social isolation and loneliness across the lifespan. First, there appears to be a genuine commitment to addressing this issue and policy makers at both the national and local levels have been engaged in planning and implementation efforts. Second, the strategies that have been used to address loneliness focus on asset-based approaches. This means that community programs and initiatives address what people want and need and also involves them in the process. This type of approach builds individual and community capacity and is therefore more likely to be

sustained. When I first arrived in Glasgow, I met with staff from the Voluntary Action Fund (VAF) who provided me with an excellent orientation and introductions to a number of "third sector" (i.e. non-profit) organisations that I would be visiting. The VAF is a fund manager which invests in initiatives that address social inequalities and builds resilient communities. They support a range of different types of organizations but their core philosophy is to invest money, develop capacity and build relationships.

The following narrative describes the work of one of several organizations that was funded by the VAF that embody this philosophy.

Annexe Communities is a vibrant community centre located in west central Glasgow. This centre has a number of interesting programs, including the *Connects2Project* for individuals over 60 years of age to assist them with improving their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, making new friends, supporting and inspiring one another and combating social isolation. They also strongly encourage participants to share their skills and talents with others. Several years ago, one person who came to the Annexe wanted to learn how to knit, and another person wanted to teach knitting. Hence the beginning of a group called: *Knit and Natter*—a group of highly engaged, talented women who get together to talk, laugh and socialize with one another while they knit blankets, clothes items and toys for those in need all over the globe--for earthquake victims in Nepal, orphans in India, Syrian refugees, Sri Lankans after floods and landslides, children in Peru, special needs children and single moms in Tanzania, a terminally ill 15 year old boy in Arizona as well as knitted items for Glaswegians! After a few years of all this knitting, the group realized that they had sent hand-knitted items to 6 of the 7 continents of the world—everywhere but ANTARCTICA!!! Subsequently a contact was found-- a niece of a staff member worked with whales and penguins in Antarctica and thus *Operation Penguin* began—the shipment of knitted penguins and other items to Antarctica! The lessons that I learned from this experience were invaluable and provide an important frame of reference for revamping my existing health behavioural theory seminar. What is important for students to understand is the need for new ways of thinking about health and well-being in the United States—what has been proposed by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as a *Culture of Health* that promotes individual and community well-being, creates healthy physical and social environments and supports access to high-quality health care for everyone. As I explored the issue of social Isolation and loneliness in the UK, I definitely saw a culture of health that reflected these values."

Humbling and amazing to witness how a big part of Connects2Project mantra of "helping you to help yourself" was realised by many beneficiaries in the form of "helping others, helped themselves" Purpose and meaning proved central to manys journey and once untangled themselves from "drama", a whole bundle of life stages, outdated self-images, overwhelming caring responsibilities, and a whole plethora of family issues…they found themselves again and woah….watch them go, see the twinkle back in their eye! Kind of making up for lost time but not regretting the lost time, more using it to fuel their new found energy or zest for life. We learned that confidence was still there, just buried and as if it had just been knocked over and over again by life. Was beautiful to watch it pump back up! We definitely grow older but now we are not so sure that we necessarily grow up!

We learned that once you got the age label or older person label out of the way, much fell away, and there was left a passion or wonderment for a new lease of life, adventure, new love of life, have some fun, getting on with all the things that had been put off until "later on". Now was the time to do all these parked dreams and aspirations and how lovely and timely to have found an encouraging space and like-minded company to go for it, and share with this new found path. Long term habits and ways of being proved quite a hurdle to traverse for many, as there seemed to be a safety- comfort- zone element that was rooted in. But watching on and being inspired by others was a main player in others breaking through these patterns of behaviour that didn't serve them anymore.

As staff we learned that our tipping point for the one full time and 2 part time staff facilitating all the beneficiaries, with all their different paths through the Connects2Project, was around the 400 beneficiaries mark. After that the beneficiaries that had been here longer seemed to naturally flow into that space, and made friends, "showed them the ropes" inspired through being more positive. Staff saturation opened up the supportive bar for the new beneficiaries from the more practised beneficiaries! Yes, work needs to be done and thrives through encouragement and or by example.

Change of mind-set was pivotal for many, getting rid of worrying was a watershed too. Witnessing penny's dropping was extremely satisfying to see. Then a new energy seemed to come from the "underneath all that baggage."!

With 5 years of 40 weeks of activities a year equalling 200 weeks of activities, each timeslot on our brochure, each class, developed into a wee community of its own. Looking out for each other, sending love, flowers and cards if someone not well, keeping an eye on each other, getting a wee cup of tea for a class member that was having a hard time, being there for each other proved very powerful and contributed to their sense of wellbeing, belonging, being part of something bigger than themselves, part of a community that cared for them as a fellow human being.

End of Connects2Project Fiesta Forever Party…..

….our project may have come to an end but the friendships and the many good memories will stay with us always. Namaste :) x Thank you!!! xxx

"Thank you all so much for the great time you provided for all at the party."

Sandra White MSP for Glasgow Kelvin- PUTTING KELVIN FIRST couldn't make our Party but ask Euan to pop in a letter of thanks for our project and all involved in the "success of the Connects2Project"-
"Dear Julie & all of the Connects2 team, Celebrating the success of the Connects2Project- As you know, I have the honour of being the Constituency MSP for Glasgow Kelvin. The area represent stretches from Thornwood all the way to the Drygate; as you can imagine there are an abundance of fantastic organisations who are doing incredible work right across Glasgow Kelvin. It is no exaggeration though when I say that in your time providing the Connects2Project it has been without doubt one of the finest projects I have had the pleasure to visit and in turn play a small part in your story. The support provided, and in turn togetherness created, through your project has hugely impressed me and I am in no doubt of the incredible benefits Connects2 has had on all participants over the years. To be unable to celebrate the achievements of this wonderful project with you in person is therefore a great disappointment but I hope you will forgive my absence due to Parliamentary commitments. The invitation alone was most gratefully received. Going forward I know the whole team at the Annexe will continue to provide the highest quality of service to your local community, and other projects will in time fill the void left by Connects2. I have no doubt the legacy of the Connects2Project will be long lasting though and I hope this letter of celebration goes some way to further ensuring the whole team at the Annexe is aware of the incredible impact you have on vulnerable individuals, as well as your entire community. Keep doing what you do so well and I hope to be able to support you in any, and all, future endeavours that you take on the behalf of the people of Partick.
Kindest regards Sandra White MSP"

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

"It's always a pleasure stopping by the Annexe! I'm so lucky to have such an amazing resource in the constituency :) Keep up the good work, folks!"

There's a lot of lonely older people out there so places like Annexe Communities really help improve your mental and physical health.

– Rena Lynch, 75

COMMUNITY FUND

"I was looking for something, didn't know what. People do love you. You can do anything you want to do in here. I learned to think differently. That's me, I'm happy as Larry"

Connects2Project

"Helping you to help yourself"

Wellbeing on your doorstep

Annexe Communities