

**SIGNPOST  
ANNUAL  
IMPACT  
REPORT  
2017-2018**





# Introduction

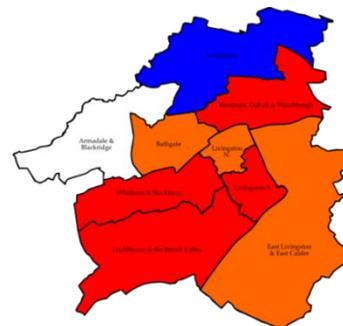
From Angela Irvine, Chair of Signpost

Welcome to our latest annual report. Our past year, the 17th since Signpost began, has been another busy and productive one. Demand for our services continues to increase, as other services make cuts and narrow their criteria for support. So far we have been able to maintain our 'open door' policy of supporting any family who contacts us where their child has additional support needs, even where there is no formal diagnosis yet.

Elsewhere in this report you will read about 'The Value of Small', new research from Lloyds TSB Foundation which identifies the many distinctive benefits that small charities offer to their beneficiaries. Signpost is an excellent example of the many ways in which a tiny charity (just 5 part-time staff, equivalent to 3.6 full-time) can give valuable support to 400+ families and also contribute in other ways to the wider local community.

I hope you enjoy this overview of our key activities and achievements this year. We have continued to fulfil our mission to ensure that families of West Lothian which include a young person with additional support needs or disabilities have the same choices and opportunities as everyone else – an 'ordinary life'.

## Signpost at a glance



Area covered: West Lothian

Age range: birth to 18

### Income and expenditure 2017-18

	2017-18	2016-17
<b>Income</b>	<b>£138,385</b>	<b>£123,796</b>
Donations & legacies	£ 6,096	£ 10,432
Charitable grants	£ 132,267	£ 113,317
Bank interest	£ 22	£ 47
<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>£90,778</b>	<b>£80,788</b>
Charitable activities	£ 90,778	£80,788
<b>Total funds carried forward:</b>	<b>£147,744</b>	<b>£100,137</b>

NB: this includes restricted funds of £85,967, and designated funds of £23,000 to mitigate the risk of having to meet legal obligations if the charity has to be wound up in the future.

# Signpost at a glance – our key activities & impacts

## Helpline and drop-in office

pro-active, parent-led, reliable, flexible and broad ranging

686 contacts in 2017-18, and demand is rising year on year

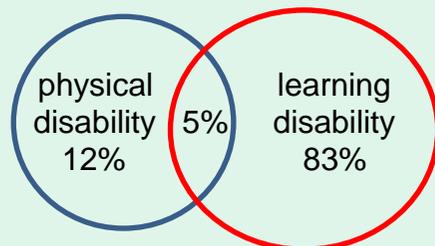
30% new contacts, 70% returners seeking support with a new issue

A wee lifeline...

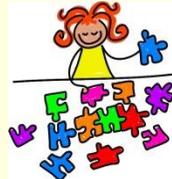
Immediate support to meet individual needs, or signposting to other agencies in our network



Age	<5	5-11	12+
Percentage	23%	52%	25%



## Autism support



'Getting Through the Day with Autism' 10-week parent training course (2 per year/16 parents)



Supporting the 'Cozmic Club' & 'Motiv8' social clubs for teenagers in mainstream school who have ASD



Autism Access service – pathway from diagnosis to further support (in partnership with NHS Lothian) 59 families were referred

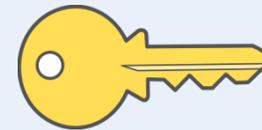


Dads' information evenings

## Growing carers' skills



Developing parents' advocacy skills (53 families this year)



Parent training on transition into adult life (in partnership with Carers of West Lothian) 16 parents



Peer support – connecting families to their community & other parents



Social events and free passes for local attractions to allow families to de-stress together (356 free days out using 6 free passes)

# The value of small

Recent research by Lloyds TSB Foundation in 'The Value of Small' describes the distinctive benefits for our families of the approach taken by the best small charities, including Signpost:

1. We are **'first responders'** and, unusually, support families even when there is no formal diagnosis of additional support needs

*"when no-one would listen Signpost took me seriously... my son was later diagnosed with autism"*

2. We are a **safe space** where people can discuss their difficulties with non-judgmental staff who have 'been there, done that', and our open door approach means people are never turned away – there is no waiting list to be seen, unlike other services

*"no question is too big or small...always helpful, they really understand what you're going through"*

3. We **promote inclusion and belonging by connecting families** to one another for mutual support, and to the community e.g. by locating suitable sports/leisure activities for children within the wider community

*"Signpost's help was invaluable... now I am helping another mum, happy to pass on my experiences"*

4. We are a **stable, embedded, trusted and long-term presence in our community**, an anchor in a sea of changing policies and services (we have watched some families grow up during our 17 year history in West Lothian)

*"It can be very daunting at first, wondering what the future holds... Signpost has been there for us at every new stage to offer good advice"*

5. We create **person-centred relationships of trust**, which support both small wins initially (e.g. empowering parents to take control or feel less stressed) and long-term engagement with us and with other services to support children to thrive

*"always there when you need them, and they stay in touch with you – that's really important"*

*"helped us to feel that we are moving forward as a family, helped us to see progress as well as areas for improvement"*

6. We **operate in the gaps between services** – statutory services are increasingly offered only to the most complex children, leaving many families with no support, & Signpost can respond by rapidly developing new services based on needs expressed

*"look, Mum, there's my friend from Lego club" (child with autism who previously had no social opportunities)*

7. We offer **advocacy** to help families negotiate difficult situations, and to support young people to make their voices heard

*"[without Signpost's support] my son would have dropped out of school with no alternative in place"*

8. We help families **avert crises** by sharing their problems with us at an early stage, and in doing so save other services time and money too, working in partnership to ensure that limited resources are used to maximum effect

*"user-friendly and have a deep understanding of the needs of families – I feel confident when I refer families to Signpost" (community practitioner)*

# The difference we make

*“If you don’t know the right question, you can’t get the right answer” - Signpost supported 459 families to identify good questions to ask, & find the right answers for their young people’s issues in 2017-18*

*“Someone to talk through what different services do... and help with planning... it is not sufficient to be given a leaflet or a website. Ideally we need someone who could be alongside in crucial stages and knows our family” – Signpost puts together information from disparate sources and empowers families to make the best decisions for their individual needs*

## The big issues faced by young people with additional support needs are...

“I need extra support but no-one will help me” – Signpost supports families that statutory services will not help

“I don’t have any friends” – Signpost directs families to local clubs and social opportunities (over 100 last year)

“I don’t have a voice when people make decisions that affect me” – Signpost helps young people to be heard

“I am not getting the right support at school” – Signpost’s advocacy service helped 53 families in 2017-18

## We asked families what would have happened if they were unable to contact Signpost. They said:

- *Before I contacted Signpost I was at the end of my road, mentally, emotionally, you name it. My family was falling apart in front of me. Since I am new to ADHD (son newly diagnosed) I wasn't aware of help groups, people who could help me fight for my son. So for me [Signpost] is a true lifeline*
- *I would have felt alone, not sure what to do next*
- *I would not have realised there was more information and services available*
- *I cannot answer that as my family was at rock bottom, so I dread to think*
- *I would have been left on my own to 'cope' with son's difficulties*
- *I'd be completely lost and wouldn't know where to begin*
- *I would have looked online but not as personal*
- *Would not have had the info we needed, so would not have been able to make decisions*

# Case studies

“My daughter C has autism. Signpost has supported us to recognise what we know already and what we still need, and to voice our emotions and worries in difficult situations. In the early days they gave us books so my daughter could understand how autism affected her. Later it was about making sure her little sister got support – Signpost suggested a siblings club, and now she knows she’s not alone, and gets so many opportunities that I couldn’t provide (my health isn’t good). Both of them have clubs, which has really boosted their confidence.

I joined a carers group, and that has helped me to speak up better. Recently we attended the transition course, which led to us getting social work involved (we’d never have known to ask them otherwise) – and it also led to C getting a place at college, another thing we didn’t think was possible”  
*(mum of C, age 16)*

## Summer Lego Club

Our summer Lego Club was designed to give 10 autistic children who had no statutory support, and who struggled with social situations, a chance to make friends. We also employed a teenager with high-functioning autism, in his first volunteering role, as one of the facilitators, and he was adept at engaging the younger children and quietly enforcing the club rules while clearly enjoying his ‘staff’ responsibilities.

We knew the club was succeeding when a mum told us that while shopping in Asda, her son shouted “Look, mum, there’s my friend from Lego club!”, when previously he had said he had no friends. Another family had to break their summer holiday in Ayr for a day to come to Lego club, as their son refused to miss it – a round trip of 140 miles! A third child eventually felt confident enough to give up the ear defenders that he always wore when away from home.

Some children have continued their friendship after the club finished.

Child A, a pre-teen with autism, was self-harming, and was talking about suicide. The family had been referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, but the child refused to engage, and was discharged. There were also major difficulties at school. Mum had no idea what to do next.

Our family support worker met with the family to discuss how to move forward. They helped the child create a graphic of their thoughts and feelings, and this was used in subsequent discussions with parents and school to make a support plan. They arranged for counselling with a service specialising in autism and also negotiated for them to join a youth club run by Barnardo’s. The school also gave support to manage school-work and social contacts better.

As a result of this advocacy, Child A became happier, engaged with counselling and the new club, and was able to cope with school.

# Looking forward

Overall, we see that the duration and complexity of referrals to our service is slowly increasing, due to a scarcity of support from other services, and this is borne out by the rapid increase in referrals that require advocacy support (increasing by 65% in 12 months, from 32 to 53).

The local landscape is changing, as cuts and restructuring are gradually undermining what was an effective and collaborative framework around children with disabilities in West Lothian, which is very frustrating and puts extra pressure on Signpost. We are having to adapt our offerings to ensure that they are still an effective use of our limited resources, and we are looking at ways to increase efficiency such as becoming more 'paperless' and improving 'self-service' information on our website.

## **Trustees 2017-18**

**Chair:** Angela Irvine

**Vice-chair:** Lynn Adams

**Treasurer:** Sajid Abbasi

**Secretary:** Sarah Sher

### **Ordinary members:**

*Dr Joan Ritchie*

*Nicola Muir*

*Julie Jack*

*Beth McRobb*

We continue to seek ways to generate income, and are currently exploring the viability of offering training courses to teachers, and local private nursery staff, to contribute to their continuing professional development. We are also working towards being 'contract ready' in order to bid for local government contracts. Funding remains a key challenge, although the support of the Big Lottery means that we have relative stability in 2018-19, with over 65% of running costs pledged or raised in advance.

We remain committed to our goal of ensuring that no child in West Lothian is disadvantaged by their additional support needs.

Our thanks to our key funders this year, without whom we would not be able to support our families:

- ✓ Big Lottery
- ✓ Corra Foundation
- ✓ Agnes Hunter Trust
- ✓ Comic Relief
- ✓ RS MacDonald Trust
- ✓ Community Capacity Fund
- ✓ West Lothian Council/  
NHS Lothian

We are also indebted to West Lothian Council and NHS Lothian for their support in kind, including the use of facilities at Beattie Campus, and ongoing grants.

And last but not least, the many individuals, too many to name, who give their time and effort to raise funds for us - your support means everything to us!



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