



GIG BUDDIES WEST LOTHIAN

2017-2020 REPORT



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Gig Buddies West Lothian



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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Gig Buddies was born from frustration of people with a learning disability not being able to have active social lives, and not being empowered to lead the lives they want. This can be because the support needs they have are such that they only have funding for a limited number of support hours and their situation is only getting harder due to pressures on local authority budgets for providing care.

Gig Buddies aims to tackle social isolation by empowering people to take control of their social life, expand their social circles, and give people more confidence in accessing the events that their local community has to offer. We do this by pairing our members to volunteers who share the same interests to become 'Gig Buddies'. This is their own, personal, one on one relationship, tailored to their interests. Through this pairing, they can go to whatever events interested them, at times which suit them. When people ask what they can do with Gig Buddies, we tell them 'It's whatever your 'gig' is'. Every member has full control over what they do with their Gig Buddy and we encourage both parties to have an active role in the planning of their events. We also work with our members to run 'member-led' social events in the local community, finding pre-existing events and inviting members along to experience new types of events, or new venue, in their area.

Our overall outcomes for the project are:

- That people with a learning disability will feel less isolated and more connected.
- To enable people to develop their own social networks and have new experiences while socialising with other people they have something in common with.
- For local venues to have a more positive and confident approach towards welcoming people with a learning disability into their venue.

GIG BUDDIES IN WEST LOTHIAN

Gig Buddies West Lothian was launched in July 2017 with a 3 year grant from West Lothian Council. Gig Buddies aims to give social opportunities to people with a learning disability, and to expand people's social circles. Geographically, West Lothian is a large area made of many town of varying sizes. Situated between the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, it has access to a wide variety of arts and live music, along with it's own strong local music scene.

Throughout this 3 year pilot of the Gig Buddies in West Lothian we have learnt many things about the area including; the state of local events, the needs of local members, and ultimately how the project can work to benefit the local area. We go into more detail about the successes and difficulties of the project further in this report.



Gig Buddies West Lothian

SUMMARY IN NUMBERS

This is a brief overview of how many members, volunteers, and pairings the project has had in its lifetime, along with how many social events we have facilitated.

33 - Members

Volunteers - 12

15 - Pairings

Social Events - 34

All numbers are correct for the time period from the project's launch in October 2017 until January 2020.

LOCAL NEED

Without projects such as Gig Buddies, people with a learning disability are at increased risk of social isolation, which in turn is detrimental to their health and wellbeing. Many parents of younger members feel that there is a strong need for Gig Buddies in West Lothian.

'It offers people social interaction, because they lose that after they leave school. It makes sure that they have something to do and aren't stuck in the house, isolated.' - Parent

'There's not enough going on in west Lothian for young people with disabilities. The demographic is quite isolated in small towns so there is a lot of isolation for young people, especially people needing support.' - Parent

Our members have told us that Gig Buddies is achieving its goal of connecting people and making people less isolated, by saying that Gig Buddies has helped benefit their social lives:

'Since I left school I haven't been able to see my friends that much. Through Gig Buddies I'm getting to meet old friends and make new ones.'

Our members also think that the project would be good for people who are in similar situations to them before they signed up:

'I think for a new person it's a good experience. It's a great thing to have if you don't have many friends'.

LOCAL NEED

Gig Buddies is a unique project to West Lothian. We feel that no other project has such a strong focus on meaningful one to one relationships grounded in the interests of its members. Speaking about what her daughter gains from her one to one Gig Buddies relationship, one parent said:

‘Companionship, independence, and a break from her family. It’s nice for her to get away from her family. If it wasn’t for Gig Buddies it would just be her family or a paid support worker that would take her out’.

Gig Buddies is also a project that actively encourages and enables its members to experience new things and explore their local area, from small local gigs at Bathgate’s Purple Orange, to world class comedy at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Kenneth, a member who has been to many different concerts with his volunteer Philip, has experienced lots of new things through the project:

‘I got introduced to new bands I’ve never heard of. Papa Roach in Edinburgh, that was really something. I’d never seen them live before. Imperial Age were also quite something, and they are now one of my all time favourites.’

We think that it’s this simplicity of introducing someone to person that’s only there to be a friend that makes Gig Buddies such a unique and important project. Informal relationships are vital to many things including improved confidence and wellbeing, and having a Gig Buddy is proved to positively benefit our members.

Our Partnerships

We pride ourselves on our community partnerships. Every relationship we develop supports our goal of enabling our members to access their community and live an active social life. Over the past 3 years, we have partnered with many different organisations that each offer our members something different. Here are just a few of our partner organisations:



Purple Orange are a grassroots rock venue in Bathgate. We have a partnership with them that allows our members to get discounted tickets to events held at the venue. In 2020 we will be working with the venue to create a short film letting people with a disability know how they can access Purple Orange.

Midnight Breakfast Club is another Bathgate music venue. We have partnered with them on a number of live music events, where they gave us use of the venue free of charge. After the sadly closed for a time in 2019, we are excited that they are open once again, and will be running socials with them throughout 2020.



Our Partnerships



We partner with Wetherspoons in Livingston for our 'mEAT UP' events. Our events with them regularly see 30 people attend. They have agreed to change their policy on reserving tables to allow our group a large amount of space every month.

Gig Buddies Scotland has been an Edinburgh Fringe charity partner since 2016. Every year we get a large amount of vouchers that enable us to offer a wide range of high quality events to our members for free. A number of West Lothian members joined us for 'Fringing 9-5' in 2019 where we spent 20 hours at the festival from 9am until 5am the following morning.



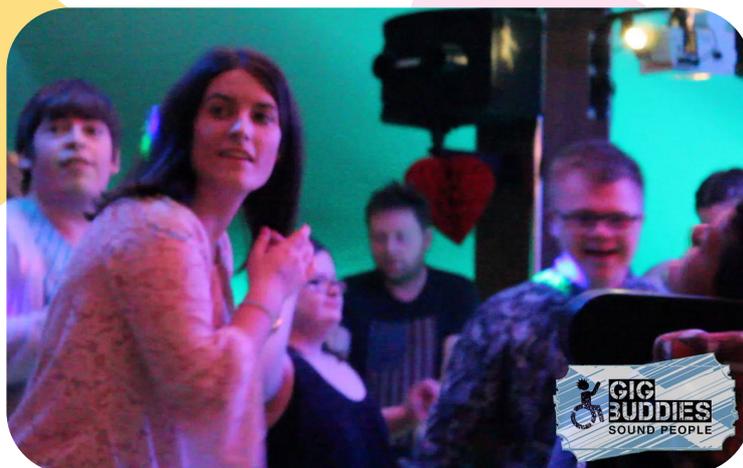
Independent Venue Week support local indie music venues. We partner with them to promote accessibility to venues and to encourage our members to get out to new events and discover their local music scene.

OUR EVENTS

The project prides itself on the fact that all of our social events take place in the local community and are more often than not, pre-existing 'mainstream' events, not events created from the ground up by the project. It is our aim to give our members knowledge of their local area and build their confidence in being able to access it. 'The socials bring more opportunities, especially the Edinburgh Festival. The group itself and what they offer is great!'



'The socials bring more opportunities, especially the Edinburgh Festival. The group itself and what they offer is great!'



mEAT UP

Many of our social events are based around a form of entertainment, often live music. At these types of events we noticed that many of our members weren't talking to each other as much as we hoped. To address this issue, we listened to our members and created 'mEAT UP'. 'mEAT UP' aims to encourage people to meet others over a bite to eat. Once a month we meet in a local pub for an hour and a half, and encourage members and volunteers to come along. After trialling the event in Midlothian, we started running monthly 'mEAT UP' events in West Lothian in October 2018.

Our West Lothian 'mEAT UP' events fast became the most consistently popular Gig Buddies events, and we continue to attract 30 regular attendees. We now have a fantastic relationship with the host venue, Wetherspoon's The New Yearfield in Livingston, with the venue management agreeing to change their policy on reserving seating to allow our group to book space for regular events.

When a new member signs up to the project we now recommend that they attend the next 'mEAT UP' event as a way to meet many other members, and find out more about the project in a casual environment.

Get Out. Grab Food. Make Friends.

mEAT UP.

mEAT UP

'I like coming to mEAT UP. It's a great atmosphere getting together. Getting to know new people is fun, it's really fantastic!'
- Cameron

'I love mEAT UP, because making friends and good food are my favourite things.' - Niamh

'The mEAT UPs are great, it's a good meal and meeting with new people and others I've met before.' - Kenneth

We have also received some fantastic feedback from parents as to how 'mEAT UP' benefits the person they support. One parent, Lynne, told us:

'Gig Buddies has been great for us, most especially Beth. She likes the regular mEAT Ups, and we are pleased it keeps Beth in a social group which she would otherwise not have.'



Another parent of a member gave us extremely positive feedback when asked if she feels that her son gains a lot from being a gig buddies member:

'Definitely, he really looks forward to the meat ups.'



REAL GIGS IN
REAL VENUES!



INDEPENDENT
V E N U E W E E K

In 2017 Gig Buddies started working as a charity partner with Independent Venue Week. IVW is a UK wide celebration of independent music venues, and we joined them as a partner to promote accessibility to live music. In 2018 we collaborated with IVW to curate an accessibility awareness gig in West Lothian that we held under our 'Real Gigs in Real Venues' banner. We partnered with a local Bathgate venue, Midnight Breakfast Club, for the event, and encouraged people with a disability to get out to a venue they might not usually go to. The gig promoted the work of musicians with a disability with the line up being made of acts from Gig Buddies, Edinburgh based organisation UPMO, and the Glasgow based workshop group KOR! Records. This event was a great success with 50 people coming along to the intimate show.

Midnight Breakfast Club were an extremely accommodating host and they invited us back to work with them later in the year. After the venue sadly closed for a time, we are delighted that they are opening again in 2019 and are developing a partnership with them once again.

In May 2018, Gig Buddies was instrumental in West Lothian's 'Learning Disability Awareness Week' celebrations. The week culminated in a Gig Buddies 'Real Gigs in Real Venues' event at Midnight Breakfast Club. Again, this was incredibly well received.

INDEPENDENT

V E N U E W E E K

REAL GIGS IN
REAL VENUES!

Learning Disability Awareness Week 2018

Independent Venue Week 2018

REAL GIGS IN REAL VENUES!

GIG BUDDIES
SOUND PEOPLE

EST. 2014
MIDNIGHT BREAKFAST CLUB

An Inclusive Evening Of Live Music To Celebrate Learning Disability Awareness Week

GIG BUDDIES SOUND PEOPLE

MO

I AM PLUTO UNDERCOVER & THE HEAVY

Friday 18th May 7:30pm / Entry £5 (Carers go free)
Midnight Breakfast Club
4 Gardeners Lane
Bathgate EH48 1TP

GIG BUDDIES SOUND PEOPLE

INDEPENDENT VENUE WEEK

EST. 2014
MIDNIGHT BREAKFAST CLUB

Gig Buddies Scotland and Independent Venue Week Present
An Inclusive evening of live music featuring...

LOOSE MORALS

GIG BUDDIES SOUND PEOPLE

REAL GIGS IN REAL VENUES!

Friday 2nd February
7pm

Tickets £5
www.skiddle.com
Midnight Breakfast Club
4 Gardeners Lane
Bathgate EH48 1TP

Booking in advance is highly recommended as entry on the night cannot be guaranteed
For more info call Gig Buddies on 0773846001 or call the venue on 07795807088



INDEPENDENT

V E N U E W E E K

2019



For IVW 2019 we enabled our members to get out to 5 gigs in 5 nights. We teamed up with Sneaky Pete's on Edinburgh's Cowgate to offer people as much choice as possible with a wide variety of gigs across the week.

One West Lothian member who attended was Bilal, who came with us to his first ever gig! He had this to say:

'I went along to two of the gigs that week. I saw 'Brigid Mae Power' and 'Shredd'. I liked them, it was a really good experience as it was bands that I've never heard of before. 'Brigid Mae Power' was the first gig I'd ever been to. She was a really good singer, it was a great first gig. It was really loud, I had to wear earplugs, we got them for free by asking at the bar. I'll definitely be going to more! The venue was a good one but it's quite small, and as I have a visual impairment I found it quite hard to get around. That's something to keep in mind if you're thinking about going.'

We think that this sums up the spirit of Gig Buddies; someone getting out to a new place and spending an evening trying something new.



CLUBNIGHTS

In 2019 we collaborated with Edinburgh organisation, Get2Gether, to run 2 clubnights at Grand Central, a Livingston nightclub.

Get2Gether have been running a clubnight in Edinburgh for many years and wanted to bring that style of event to West Lothian. However, they hadn't done any previous work in West Lothian, so collaborating with Gig Buddies was a good opportunity to encourage both of our members and audiences to attend a new type of event.

The first event was held in March 2019 and saw roughly 80 people attend. Due to the success of this event, we collaborated once again in November. Based on feedback from attendees, we are looking to make this a regular event that we run every 3-6 months.



'Everyone had such a great time'

CHALLENGES

Volunteer Support

The biggest challenge that the project has faced is volunteer recruitment. During the past 3 years, the project has admittedly struggled to recruit the desired number of volunteers. However, with a number of changes and improvements, we are starting to see a definite increase in the popularity of our volunteering opportunity.

The first step we took was to simplify and streamline our application process. We carefully assessed the application and evaluated what information was essential that potential volunteers provide us with. This significantly reduced the time it took to complete the application, and made it much clearer to applicants why they needed to provide the information we asked for. We also changed from an online system, to a document that can be completed either on a computer or in person. This proved to be a clear improvement when recruiting for the role at events such as volunteer and career fairs.

In late 2019 we had success from utilising local news, with an article in the West Lothian Daily Record. This told people the basic aims of the project and how they could get involved.

West Lothian Voluntary Gateway has recently changed their structure and the way they operate. Since this change we have noticed a much improved correspondence with them and a more active approach to getting our role out to the public.

West Lothian College are also strong supporters of the project and have given us many opportunities to advertise the role to students and staff. This has shown to be particularly beneficial since we changed our application process.

CHALLENGES

Project Clarity

We also felt that combining our projects as 'Gig Buddies Scotland' bought it's own challenges. A major change that we made was to seperate our social media pages clearly defining each of our projects. The Facebook page 'Gig Buddies West Lothian' was then created for content specific to the local area, while a 'Gig Buddies Scotland' page shares information for all of our projects. This means the we know exactly who we are targeting by posting on each specific page, and viewers know exactly what area a peice of content concerns. This too has proved incredibly beneficial for potential volunteers finding out more information about how to get involved in their local area.



LOOKING FORWARD

The past 6 months have been extremely positive in terms of volunteer recruitment and we are now in the positive position of pairing more members and creating more pairs of Gig Buddies in West Lothian.

We are looking forward to developing our existing relationships with local venues, as well as building new ones with venues such as 'The Dreadnaught', and with local festivals such as 'Sing on The Bing'.

Gig Buddies Scotland now operates in West Lothian, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, with 3 staff members. It is our aim to enable members to travel across these three areas to attend any event that interests them, further developing their confidence, social circles, knowledge of the Scottish arts and music scene, and more. We feel that this is of particular importance to our members in West Lothian as it can help build their confidence and knowledge of getting out to the two neighbouring cities and experiencing everything they have to offer.

Early in 2020 we will be recruiting a team of Gig Buddies West Lothian Ambassadors. This is a voluntary role for members that we developed in Edinburgh throughout 2019. It sees members take on a more active role in the project in a number of ways, including helping train volunteers, promoting accessibility with our partner venues, and introducing new members to the group at social events.





GIG BUDDIES WEST LoTHIAN



Gig Buddies West Lothian



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West Lothian
Council