

### Hello from Katie

Welcome to the Equal Futures Newsletter! We have lots of stories and information to share with you. There have been a few new faces within Equal Futures, and we thought we better introduce ourselves.

I am Katie Winn, and I am currently the temporary Managing Director for Equal Futures. I have worked for the Thera Trust (Equal Futures' parent company) for over 17 years, most recently as their Head of Development. I am passionate about working with people with a learning disability and their families to inform our work and influence wider pieces of work. I want the people we work with to live the life they choose.

Friendship is important to us all. It has a positive impact on our wellbeing, but also gives us an opportunity to learn, be social and have our ideas heard. I recognise that for people with a learning disability, their connections beyond families are often limited to paid professionals. I am committed, along with the wider Equal Futures Team, to support people in their journey to find friendship in their lives to achieve their dreams and aspirations, but also to help through the more difficult times that life can often bring.



The Equal Futures Team have been working exceptional hard to develop a wider range of resources for people and their families, volunteers, and other professionals. This includes information around Circles of Support and the benefits that they bring. We are very excited to share them with you as part of this newsletter.

I have been humbled to hear all the great achievements from people, with the support of the Befrienders and Project Coordinators – I hope you enjoying reading them too.

## Hello from Clare

Hi everyone, I am Clare Pride, a Project Manager.

All my life I have been passionate about supporting people with a learning disability to have an equal life. My grandparents 40 years ago adopted my Auntie Julie. Julie was a young person who had learning disabilities and autism. She had lived in long stay institutions up until this time. At a very young age I was seeing the importance of people having an active, supportive Circle of Support. I saw how without connections within communities, people can become very isolated and have a negative impact on their overall wellbeing! This gave me the inspiration and motivation to support adults with a learning disability, and I have done so for 26 years. I joined the Thera Group as their vision and values aligned with mine. I have for the last 15 years been fortunate enough to be able to lead and manage bringing the vision alive with people and their families. I have many challenging but wonderful stories that I regularly share.

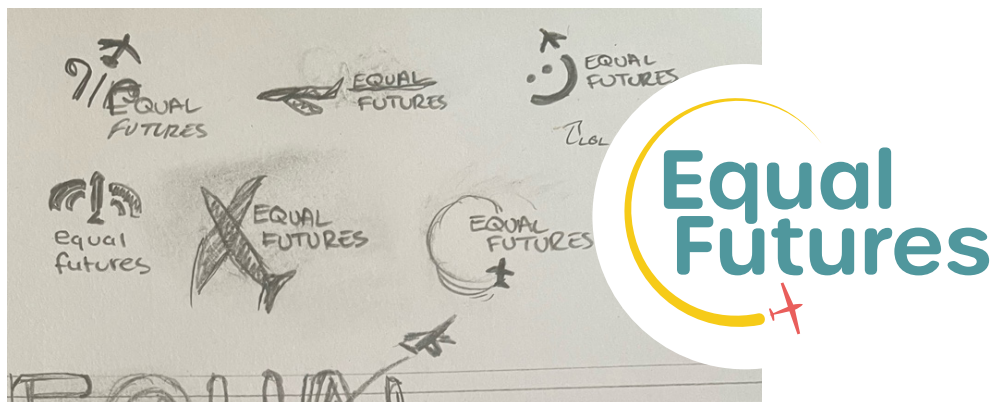
I recently gained the pleasure of being asked to do some project work with Equal Futures. I was instantly met with an incredibly passionate, motivated, and inspiring team. Equal Futures' mission - to support people to develop natural



relationships that last a lifetime - certainly ignites interest and energy to support the team to achieve it!

I am looking forward to supporting Equal Futures as they develop and would like to thank everyone for such a warm welcome!

## Our new, new logo



Many of you may remember that we recently showed a new logo that was an improvement – but not too far removed – from our earlier one. We decided that the logo was still not right. We wanted to do an in-depth re-brand for Equal Futures that would better reflect where we had come from, and where we intend to go. With project leading from Clare Pride and Ellie Wade, we worked with Laura Renfrew from the Thera Trust to come up with this new logo that we hope will stay with us for a long time. It is inspired by a story from one of the first people Equal Futures supported, Lindsay:

Lindsay was born with a condition in her skull and later caught a disease, both leading to a learning disability.

She also has a physical disability, for which she uses a wheelchair and a walker.

In amongst the many exciting activities Lindsay does as she lives a very full life, one day Lindsay pointed to something in the sky and told her family that she was going to be “In there one day”. It turned out what she was pointing to was a glider plane.

Sure enough, Lindsay’s prediction was right – today she has done more than 130 flights in a glider plane, including some tricks like loop-de-loops that initially scared her parents!

Lindsay’s achieved many things, including her goal to fly, with support from Equal Futures’ Circle of Support model. Her story is a testament to what we can achieve together. We are proud to represent her story, and many others like hers, with this new logo.



## Circle of Support workshops coming your way

An Equal Futures Circle of Support is a team of people for a person with a learning disability.



They meet regularly – our aim is to meet that person’s goals and listen to what they want and need. It usually also involves:

- People important in their life, such as family or friends
- Equal Futures volunteers
- Facilitation from an Equal Futures Project Coordinator

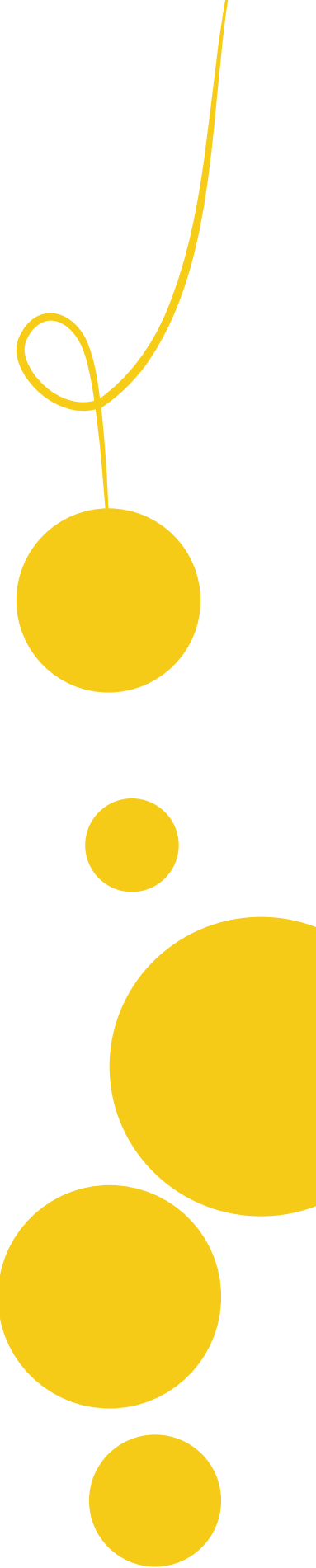
We believe that people with a learning disability should be supported to live their best lives. Our Circles of Support are not one-size-fits-all, we cater to the unique wants and needs of individuals, while supporting their safety, health, and wellbeing.

“I would never have been able to [reach all my goals] if it wasn’t for the support of Equal Futures and my circle of support. I now live a meaningful independent life and I am excited about what the future holds.”

– **Fiona**, one of our many Circles of Support success stories!

Circles of Support take time to set up – on average about 2 years to become a smooth functioning team.

Do you want to find out more about our Circles of Support? Your local Project Coordinator will be happy to help – their contact details are at the end of this newsletter. You can also ask them for the Equal Futures ‘Safe and Secure’ book – this will help you understand what a Circle of Support is, and how to get started creating one.





## Jamie and Fany

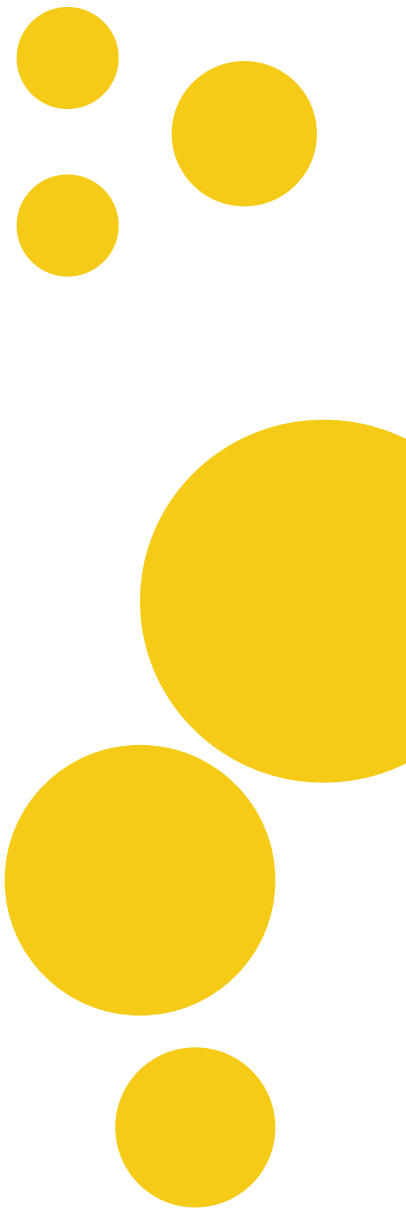
Jamie is autistic and lives with his younger brother and his mum, Kat. Kat cares for both her sons without any social care or other support. Jamie's autism makes it difficult for him to socialise. He barely left his home during 2022.

Equal Futures met Jamie in 2023. They matched him with a volunteer befriender called Fany. Although initially reluctant, Jamie became interested when he heard about all the things they had in common - such as games and music.

Fany visits Jamie at home, and they enjoy chatting about their shared interests. They also message regularly when not together. Jamie responds to Fany in less than an hour, which is unheard of according to Kat - "It is a huge step for my son!"

Since he has started spending time with Fany, Jamie is becoming chattier. He is also more interested in the world outside his home. They went on a walk and a trip to a museum. They have many more activities planned, all at Jamie's pace.

"It's really amazing to witness Jamie's difference along the way," Fany shares. "I could never take all the credit for his change... I believe I learn and grow alongside him... Our conversation is effortless."



This new friendship has also given Kat some support. She is less worried about Jamie, and he doesn't have to always rely on her.

Kat says, "Equal Futures have changed my son's life and I am very much looking forward to what lies ahead for Jamie. The bleak future I envisaged is slowly disappearing into hope and happiness for him.

"A befriender can break down social barriers that I, as his mum, cannot. ...Fany is helping him to grow into the young man he can be."

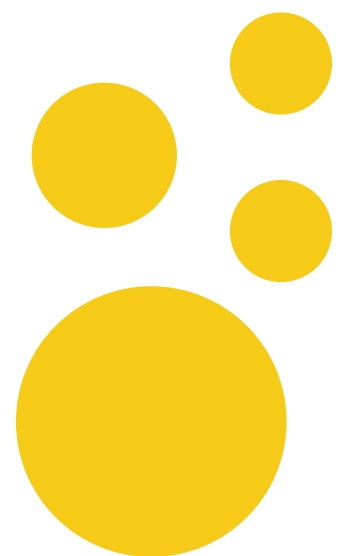


## **Lisa's volunteering experience**

I have been volunteering with Equal Futures now for just short of a year. I chose to volunteer with them for several reasons. Firstly, I know that once I graduate from university, I would like to work within the third sector. I thought it would be wise to get more of a feel for what it is like to be involved in the sector.

Equal Futures has been extremely good for this by getting volunteers to help arrange events and inviting us to take part in their fundraising events, such as the Kilt walk that we did earlier this year.

I also have a personal link to Equal Futures' cause, as my twin brother has autism. I am also doing my dissertation



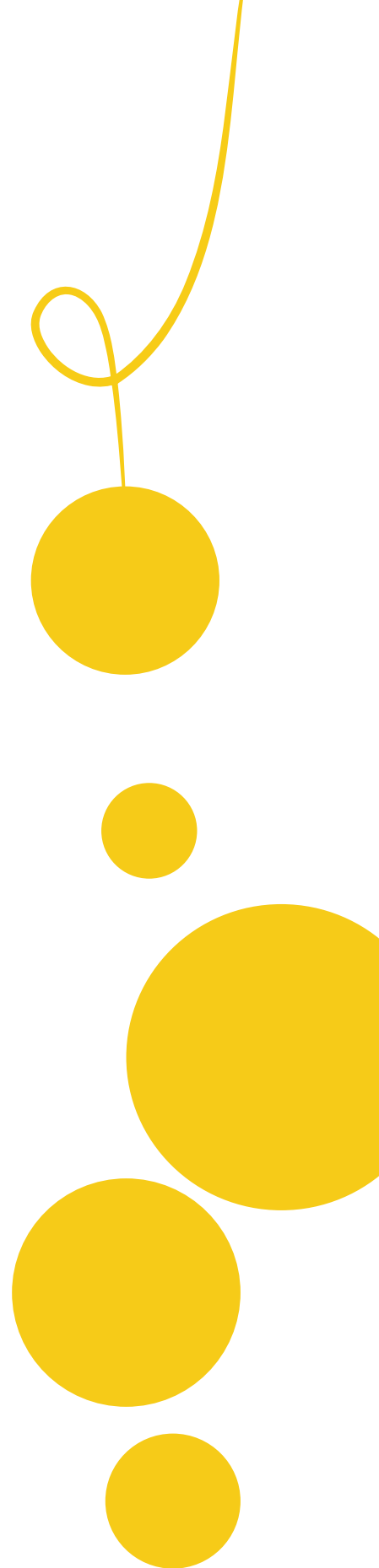
about the impact of COVID-19 and Austerity on adults with learning disability and autism. Both make me naturally very interested in the work Equal Futures do.

Secondly, Equal Futures looks after their volunteers very well. Not only does it fit in well within my studies, but my supervisor Donna has also been extremely helpful by supplying references for me, checking in regularly, and signposting other volunteering opportunities within the charity that may be of interest to me.

Furthermore, Equal Futures' staff have taken the time out of their busy schedules to take part in interviews for my dissertation research, which was incredibly helpful to me and my studies. The work that Equal Futures do is extremely worthwhile.

As the sibling and secondary carer of someone with autism and a learning disability, I can safely say that what the Equal Futures do is priceless for the families they support. The Project Coordinators go over and above their remit to supply advice and emotional support for those who need it across Lanarkshire, Ayrshire, and the Lothians. It is a pleasure to be able to volunteer with them and help families in any way I can.

-Lisa







## Updates from Stacey, an Equal Futures Project Coordinator

We have successfully held 2 online sessions which have been well attended. I collaborated with a person new to Equal Futures who attended both events and really enjoyed them. This person is very socially isolated - they live alone and have no family support. These events are allowing them to meet up with people, and potentially make friendships they wouldn't have otherwise not been able to do.

I am also working with one person who is very anxious about meeting new people and all that comes with that. Their mum was very keen for them to join the online session to make new friends. After I explained to the person I was supporting what was going to happen during the call, that they did not need to have her camera or microphone on, and that they didn't need to speak at all if they didn't want to - they said they would think about joining. They did join and actually spoke up in the call which was really nice to see. Their mum was really pleased as well. I am hoping this helps the person's confidence to be able to come along to our face-to-face events, and chat with people they have already met online.

- Stacey



## Befriending Week – celebrating our volunteers

Befriending Week ran from Wednesday 1 to Tuesday 7 November. During this week, we wanted to celebrate and show our gratitude to all our current and past Befriender volunteers.

You have all been so generous with your time, skills, care, and compassion. You all truly impact the Equal Futures community and have an essential role in contributing to the support we offer.

Your support and encouragement have given the individuals we work with:

- Confidence and opportunities to be included within their local community.
- Quality time to develop and practice social skills and feel more comfortable travelling around.
- The opportunity to share and celebrate special lifetime events with friends.

We wanted to share a few things that our volunteers have said. First, Anna shares what they believe becoming a volunteer is all about:

“Oscar Wilde once said, ‘the smallest act of kindness is worth more than the grandest intention.’ Being a volunteer is to become the heart and soul of positive change, dedicating our time and passion to create a better world.”

The other story we would like to share is from an anonymous volunteer:

“I decided to volunteer after struggling a few years ago with my mental health. I was supported by my friends, family, doctor, and other organisations. This reminded me of how

valuable the support of people and organisations was for my own health and why I really wanted to give back to others who might need a little help too.”

You are all so wonderful, thank you!

Watch this space! Equal Futures will be offering more exciting and rewarding opportunities for people to volunteer and contribute. We are ready to grow our friendly and supportive community as big as possible.

## Look out for our website refresh

As part of our new re-branding, our website will soon get a refresh – keep an eye on **[equalfutures.org.uk](https://equalfutures.org.uk)** to see our new look.

## Join us at our celebration event

Our celebration event is set for Monday 15 January 2023 – keep an eye out for an invitation with more details.

## Your feedback on our future

We have been working on our plans for the next 3 years. We would really like to share our initial thoughts and also gather your feedback.

Visit the survey at **[thera.co.uk/equal-futures-survey](https://thera.co.uk/equal-futures-survey)** - or scan the QR code below. We really look forward to hearing what you think should be included.





## How to contact us

You can reach your Project Coordinator for your area by email or telephone:

Jane Mcallister (Edinburgh and Lothians):

[Jane.Mcallister@equalfutures.org.uk](mailto:Jane.Mcallister@equalfutures.org.uk)

0771 334 2311

Donna McCallum (Lanarkshire and Ayrshire):

[Donna.McCallum@equalfutures.org.uk](mailto:Donna.McCallum@equalfutures.org.uk)

0792 139 7615

Stacey Burgess (Glasgow):

[Stacey.Burgess@equalfutures.org.uk](mailto:Stacey.Burgess@equalfutures.org.uk)

0759 096 5527

All of us are home-based and do not have an office.

If you do not want to get In the Loop anymore, please let your Project Coordinator know.

Our members are at the heart of everything we do. If you have a good news story or something to celebrate, please let us know - we would love to hear it! Contact your Project Coordinator today!

