

THE RIDGE SCIO

SOCIAL IMPACT REPORT

2024-2025



05



SOCIAL IMPACT REPORT

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Message from the Chair

Welcome to our 2024–25 Social Impact Report. This past year has been one of transformation for The Ridge.

After years of planning, fundraising, and dedicated work from staff, apprentices, and volunteers, we are now poised to open our new Support Centre and Training Kitchen at Black Bull Close.

The challenges of the cost-of-living crisis, mental health pressures, and housing insecurity remain stark, but the resilience and creativity of our community have shone through. With the continued backing of funders, partners, and friends, The Ridge has delivered more services, more training opportunities, and more visible improvements to our shared spaces than ever before.

Thank you for standing with us as we continue to change lives, restore places, and strengthen our community.



HEATHER BLACKWOOD
Chair of the Board

Overview - Our Story Continues

Since 2012, The Ridge has been committed to opening doors for people who have been shut out of opportunity.

By the end of the 2024–25 period, we are on the cusp of opening Black Bull Close Support Centre & Training Kitchen, expanding life-transforming apprenticeships, bringing new life to Empire Close gardens, and launching a wide range of community events. Looking ahead, we are preparing to bring Flishers Close and 86–88 High Street into community use, creating opportunities for therapeutic spaces, housing, and training facilities.

At its heart, The Ridge continues to believe that everyone has something positive to offer — and our work is about giving people the chance to discover and share that potential.





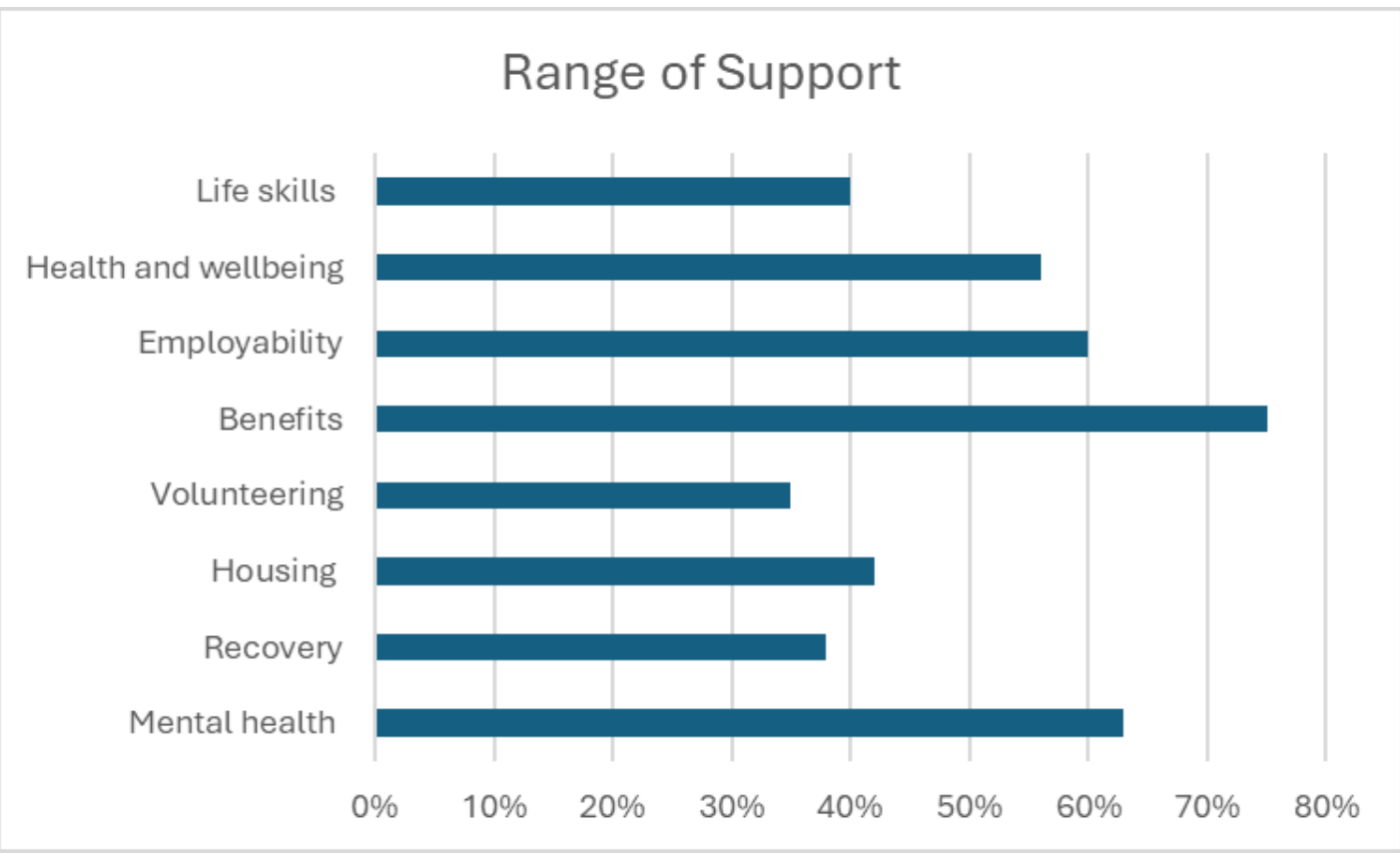
Support Team - Here for our Community

Building Stronger Futures

The Ridge Support Service exists to provide tailored, person-centred support for people in our community who are facing barriers to work, education, and wellbeing. Many of those who come to us are dealing with challenges such as low confidence, poor mental health, lack of qualifications, or long-term unemployment. Our role is to meet people where they are, listen to their goals, and walk alongside them as they take the steps needed to move forward.

This year our Support Service responded to a record number of referrals, with over 350 individuals and families engaging with us. The majority were self-referrals, reflecting the trust that people place in The Ridge as a safe first port of call. We also worked closely with DWP, Social Security Scotland, East Lothian Council, NHS, and many other partners to ensure that people had access to the right support at the right time.

Our team provided practical help around housing, benefits, and food insecurity, as well as emotional support through peer groups, wellbeing workshops, and one-to-one sessions and access to our Community larder. We opened a new outreach hub in a rural village together with our partners and developed dedicated programmes for young people facing complex needs.



Practical Help, Emotional Support, Lasting Change

Our counselling and befriending service offers confidential support from trained counsellors and regular social contact from volunteers to reduce loneliness. These services have been a lifeline for many, helping people build resilience, improve mental health, and feel more connected.

Our employability support helps people prepare for and sustain meaningful work through one-to-one coaching, CV and interview preparation, job-search support, and placements via our Constructing Futures programme. For many, this has been the bridge to training, apprenticeships, and long-term jobs, boosting both skills and confidence.

Support is delivered through a mix of one-to-one sessions, group workshops, and hands-on opportunities, creating a safe environment where participants can grow. The team's compassion and persistence ensure people feel heard and supported when they need it most.

The impact is clear: participants gain skills and qualifications, rebuild confidence and belonging, and move into work, training, or community life. Above all, the Ridge Support Service creates lasting change, giving people the tools and encouragement to take control of their future and thrive.



Gardens - Everyone is Welcome Here



The Ridge gardens remain a space of welcome, growth, and community pride. Backlands Garden reopened this year after extensive restoration, and Empire Close was transformed with new planting and community-led design.

Volunteers, children, and apprentices worked side by side in food growing, horticulture training, and new Apothecary workshops. The gardens produced vegetables for community meals, flowers for sale, and herbs for wellbeing programmes. We were delighted to once again receive an 'Outstanding' award in the RHS 'It's Your Neighbourhood' scheme.

The gardens continue to demonstrate how neglected spaces can be transformed into places of beauty, learning, and belonging.

The Ridge Foundations - Building Futures

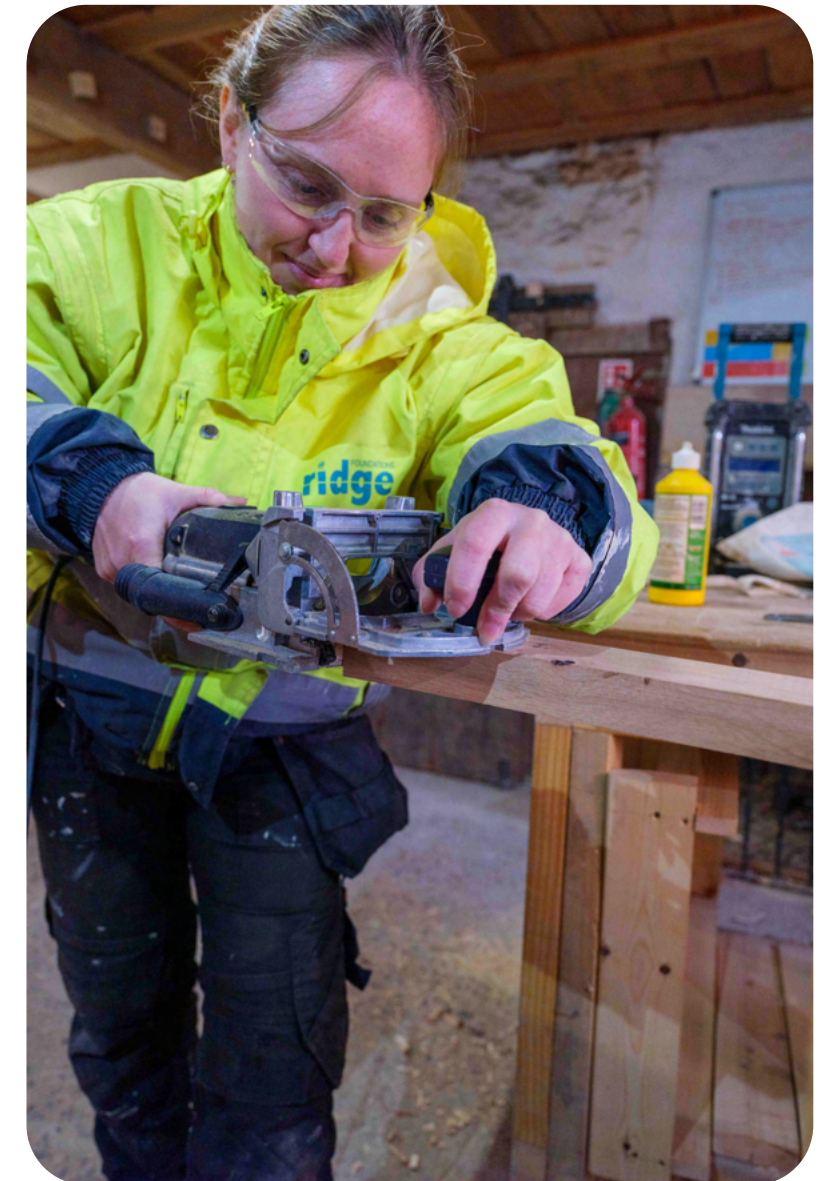
2024–25 has been a milestone year for our apprentices. Their work at Black Bull Close has taken a derelict site and restored it into a vibrant Support Centre and Training Kitchen. Apprentices learned stonemasonry, plastering, joinery, and heritage conservation in real-world settings, producing work of lasting value for the community.

- 5 NEW PRE-APPRENTICE TRAINEESHIPS
- 1 NEW APPRENTICE
- 5 APPRENTICES ‘GRADUATED’, 3 MOVING TO JOBS AT HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND
- 1 ‘APPRENTICE OF THE YEAR’ AT EDINBURGH COLLEGE
- 1 ‘GRADUATE’ EMPLOYED IN TRF TEAM



External projects included stone restoration at St Mary’s, the creation of a finial for a local Category A Listed building, detailed joinery, and plastering across multiple historic sites. Three apprentices moved into employment with Historic Environment Scotland and other local construction firms, testament to their skills and commitment.

EVERY PIECE OF WORK UNDERTAKEN BY OUR APPRENTICES TELLS A STORY OF RESILIENCE, GROWTH, AND PRIDE.



Training - Learning that Lasts

Training opportunities at The Ridge continue to grow. This year 42 young people achieved SQA-accredited qualifications in Construction and Rural Skills.

Our partnership with Historic Environment Scotland supported eight young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET), five of whom progressed directly into employment.

Alongside technical training, these youngsters developed confidence, communication, and teamwork skills that will stay with them for life.

The Ridge training model is rooted in authenticity: real work, real skills, real outcomes.



APPRENTICE CASE STUDY

Apprentice A joined us after school, having left without attaining formal qualifications and already experiencing challenges with substance use and family issues. Initially, he began a CWR course with us, focusing on the fundamentals of employability and job applications. During this time, he also gained work experience at The Ridge, where he demonstrated a particular enthusiasm for stone masonry.

Recognising that he lacked the basic numeracy and literacy skills required for an apprenticeship, we facilitated adult learning sessions to help him build these foundations. Following this support, he was offered a four-year apprenticeship in stone masonry.

Throughout his apprenticeship, Apprentice A had access to our holistic support services, which he utilized for challenges including severe drug and housing issues. At one point, he experienced homelessness, and we supported him in finding suitable accommodation. This chaotic life outside work had significant impact on his physical and mental health, which made sustaining his apprenticeship extremely challenging. However, the focus on having the apprenticeship to work back towards gave him the necessary impetus to engage fully with the support offered, and over time, he was able to overcome those challenges and return to his training with renewed enthusiasm.

Upon completing his apprenticeship, he secured a work placement with HES, gaining valuable experience working on historic sites and applying the skills and knowledge acquired during his apprenticeship.

Following this placement, Apprentice A continued to receive support and has now progressed to a role as a team leader at another historic site. This role provides him with stability and opportunities for future development, demonstrating the transformative impact of sustained training, support, and opportunities for young people facing complex challenges.



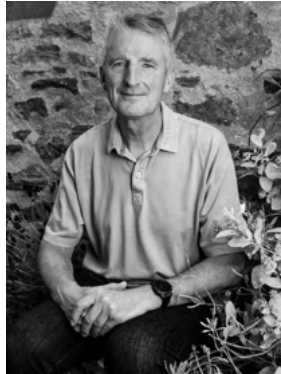


Board of Trustees



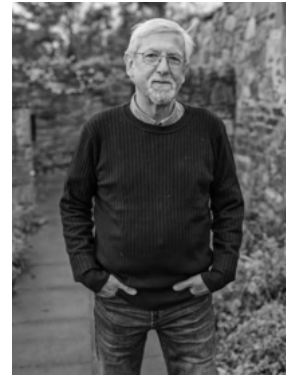
HEATHER BLACKWOOD
CHAIR

Heather was born in Inverness and moved to Edinburgh to study law. She has been a lawyer for 40 years, initially as a court practitioner. In 1993, she became a tribunal judge with the Social Security Appeal tribunal. In 2005 she was appointed as a legal member of the Mental Health Tribunal for Scotland (MHTS) and she continues to work part time as a Convener of Mental Health Tribunals. She served on the Parole Board for Scotland from 2008 and became vice chairman in 2011. Heather and her husband moved to Dunbar from Paisley in 2015. Her interests include dog walking, gardening and drawing and painting.



JOHN IRVINE
TRUSTEE

John spent his career as a Chartered Surveyor, latterly as UK Development Director for an international property group. He has experience in managing teams of employees and consultants engaged in the development process, as well as the strategy and running of a large company. John has also held appointments as a voluntary director for a housing association and for Architecture and Design Scotland. He is now retired and spends his time rowing, cycling, running and gardening (aches and pains permitting!).



ANDY PRINGLE
TRUSTEE

Born in Aberdeen, Andy has moved around Scotland, graduating from Glasgow University many years ago, then chasing the technology industry from Greenock to Glenrothes, most recently working for semiconductor and photonics companies in Edinburgh and Livingston. He moved to Dunbar in 2013 and, now is keen to help develop the unique environment this town offers. He has recently retired from the workplace and hopes his skills in general management and data analysis can help the Ridge, which he joined as trustee in November 2022. The aims of the Ridge - supporting and helping people develop their life skills, improving the environment for the community, and restoring dilapidated old buildings - are a good fit with his personal interests.



ROB BISSET
TRUSTEE

Rob has lived in Dunbar nearly his whole life. He spent all his working life at the local cement works, eventually reaching the post of Chief Electrical and Process Control Engineer. He has previously held director positions at Edinburgh and District Employers Training Association Ltd (EDETA), Dunbar Community Development Company (DCDC) as a representative of the Dunbar Community Sports Clubs Association and at Hallhill Ltd. His hobbies are campervanning, geocaching, birdwatching and gardening, and a strong interest in the history and development of Dunbar, tracing some of his town ancestry back to the 17th Century.



PAUL BUDIS
TRUSTEE

Paul was born in Dumfries spending his formative years in Cumbernauld. Paul has lived and worked in Scotland and England with 6 years in Spain, studying for the priesthood. Paul was a priest in Glasgow for 5 years before moving into HR. A qualified HR professional, he has experience in central and local government as well as the private sector. He is a skilled consultant, trainer and facilitator with specific interest in equality and diversity issues. Until recently he ran his own Civil Ceremonies company and has conducted many funerals and weddings. Now retired, he enjoys dogwalking, cooking, trying to keep fit and watching football. He is a keen reader, interested in politics and current affairs.



FRASER BELL
TRUSTEE

Fraser is a RIAS Accredited Conservation Architect with a specialised interest in the sensitive restoration/adaptive re-use of historic buildings to improve overall sustainability. With over 16 years of experience leading award-winning public and private projects he has successfully delivered major publicly-funded projects on listed buildings. Fraser has a passion for working with arts and community-based clients to deliver their briefs within heritage buildings. His interest in The Ridge stems from his passion for heritage and its ability to empower people and improve their lives. In his free time, Fraser can usually be found with his young family on one of East Lothian's beaches, where he is a keen sea swimmer and paddleboarder.



DANIEL McNALLY
TRUSTEE

Daniel is the Managing Director and owner of Copper Grey Developments, a company specialising in residential property development and renovation. With over 18 years of experience in the construction industry, he has earned a strong reputation for delivering high-quality projects throughout Edinburgh and East Lothian. In addition to his passion for property development, Daniel is dedicated to making a positive impact in the charity sector. He is excited to be bringing his expertise and enthusiasm to his new roles on The Ridge Foundations' Board of Directors, and as a Trustee of The Ridge SCIO.

THANK YOU

YOUR HEART, YOUR COMMUNITY, YOUR SUPPORT, OUR SHARED FUTURE.



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