

Big Lottery assists four Edinburgh projects

✘ Edinburgh's most vulnerable and marginalised communities can look forward to a brighter future thanks to £1.8 million of Lottery funding announced today by the Big Lottery Fund.

Today's grants from the Big Lottery Fund in Edinburgh are part of a wider £6.5 million funding package. Big Lottery Fund Scotland Chair, Alison Magee, said: "Today's investment will help to tackle some of the big issues affecting the quality of life of people, young and old, in Edinburgh and the Lothians. For those people struggling with loneliness, poverty and homelessness the award to the Grassmarket Community Project will help to create a place where they can access essential services and begin to rebuild their lives.

"Across the city three other funded projects help to reduce the financial burden faced by people with learning difficulties and will give vulnerable young people the skills and confidence to take up work placements that benefit both them and their communities."

The Greyfriars Tolbooth & Highland Kirk is one of four Edinburgh and Lothian projects sharing today's funding. With an award of £709,882 the group can now expand its [Grassmarket Community Project](#) to provide a purpose-built drop-in centre for homeless people and other adults that supports this vulnerable community in dealing with mental health concerns and long term unemployment, through a range of workshops and services.

Andy Soutar, 34, was homeless for two years but since he's been involved with the Grassmarket Community Project his life has turned around. He said:- "Before I came here I was homeless and living in a hostel for two years. I was very

quiet and had a lot of hassle in my life, lots of ups and downs like a rollercoaster. I now have my own flat which was a big goal for me so I'm now able to think about getting a job. I'd like to carry on working here being self-employed. It won't happen overnight, but I'm prepared to work hard and be patient."

Andy's confidence has been boosted by his experience of volunteering at one of the project's workshops over the last 12 months. He added; "The atmosphere here is fab, we work hard but have a laugh at the same time. I like being one of the people who's been here a bit longer now that we have some new people. I try to carry on creating that atmosphere and it's great to be passing on my skills and experience to new people in the group. Now I have much more confidence and I'm full of self-belief."

Reverend Richard Frazer, Minister at Greyfriars Tolbooth and Highland Kirk and Chair of the Grassmarket Community Project, said: "This project, that has the support of so many different community groups, is changing the lives of many participants for the better; through a mixture of mentoring, education and social enterprise. The new home for our work will be a huge source of encouragement and inspiration to our many service users.

"It will allow people with serious mental health or substance misuse problems and who are at risk of homelessness to access a fuller range of appropriate services and who, as a result, will not be homeless due to contact with our programmes. The new space will also create a host of new and imaginative initiatives that will overcome isolation, lack of aspiration and low self-esteem amongst many people."

Young people aged 16 to 24 years in Muirhouse and across North Edinburgh, now have a brighter future, thanks to a grant of £320,012 to the Tomorrow's People Trust and its Working it Out project. The charity, which supports people into work, will

offer disadvantaged young people practical work experience in their communities. As well as providing work experience the project will also offer help with job searches and will provide one to one after care once the work placement has finished.

Brian Gibson, National Manager Young People's Services, Tomorrow's People Trust, said: "We are delighted to be able to expand the Working It Out project which will support vulnerable young people into employment, education and training. The project works with young people who are aged 16-24, helping them to develop their skills, confidence and motivation through a series of community challenges and intensive, practical employment support. Of those who complete the programme 79% go on to work, training or education."

Two grants awarded today will help those least able to navigate the welfare system make sense of the changes and will ensure that vulnerable families don't miss out in the future. Set up by parents of children with learning disabilities, the Action Group receives an award of £583,237 to help over 700 people in Edinburgh and the Lothians make sense of the recent changes to their benefits entitlements. The project's dedicated support staff will work with people with learning disabilities and other support needs such as autism and aspergers, as well as their carers, to help them access what they are entitled to, as well as helping them to manage their future finances.

Joan Griffiths, MBE, Chair of the Action Group, said: "We are delighted to announce a new project, which will work to tackle disadvantage and financial exclusion across the Lothians. The Welfare Rights and Financial Inclusion project will help people who have learning disabilities, autism and/or aspergers syndrome, mental health issues and other support needs, and their families and carers, to access correct benefit entitlements, navigate changes to the benefits system and reduce barriers to financial inclusion. We will also work with

people to build their skills and confidence in dealing with money issues wherever possible.”

Fair Ltd works with people with learning disabilities, their families and carers in central Edinburgh. Thanks to an award of £268,967 the group will provide advice relating to changes in the benefit system as well as representing clients at appeal tribunals if their benefit claim is refused.

Kimberly Swan, Fair Manager said: “This project responds to welfare reform and the impacts it is having on people with learning disabilities, their families and carers. We aim to provide clients with information about changes and explain the impact as well as helping those with new benefit claims and ensuring they get their claims reviewed when their circumstances change. We are delighted to receive money from the Big Lottery Fund as without this we would be unable to assist and support the people we know require it the most.”

Charles Ballantyne, 54, said, “Fair has helped us all so much as a family and made a lot of difference to us. As well as helping us out financially they have taken away a lot of stress from my wife and my sons. It’s a great organisation and I don’t know what we would have done without them.”