

# **Focus on Edinburgh charities – Ecas**

**In March, in common with other charities and organisations in the third sector, Edinburgh charity, Ecas, had to close its doors.**

This had an impact on the charity and the people it works with – all of whom have a physical disability. Ecas has worked hard all year to make sure that it continued as many of its services as possible online, to try and combat any feelings of loneliness and isolation.

With the help of Zoom and telephones, Ecas has kept its befriending service going, and their Young People's Service, which only began this year, has still launched.

The befriending service matches volunteers up with a person who needs someone to talk to, or in usual circumstances, to meet up with a befriender. It is essential to Ecas that both parties get something out of the experience, and while it was not possible to meet up in person, the befriending activity has continued online. Anyone who thinks they would benefit from the service either as a volunteer befriender or as a befriender should contact the charity.

One person who used the online Distance Befriending Service is Joan who was introduced to John. They share a love of crime novels and talk about everything from books to family, politics and football.

Joan said: "He matches up with me brilliantly.

“We’re always talking and laughing. I can talk to him about what’s going on with me, and he tells me what he’s up to. I look forward to our calls.”

The charity runs a variety of arts and crafts classes, music, yoga, computing and seated tai chi and meditation, all of which have been adapted to online. Ecas can support people with computer equipment and software to enable all of this.

Their Young People’s Service is a partnership working with those aged 18 to 30 who have a physical disability and who would benefit from the mentoring and goal setting on a one to one basis.

CEO, Ally Irvine, said that this service came from some research into how best to meet the needs of younger physically disabled people. He said: “We have developed a new service that is distinct from services already running. The service works in partnership with young people on a one to one basis, to help explore their options and identify goals that reflect their unique circumstances.”



CEO of Ecas, Ally Irvine

The charity is perhaps one of Edinburgh's less well known names, but it has a long history. It began in 1902 when Miss Maitland Hog brought together a band of volunteers who would visit over 90 children supplying basic equipment such as surgical boots and artificial limbs. She also insisted that school boards should be required to provide an education for children with a disability.

The charity has since weathered many storms including a

previous pandemic. Ally said: "This isn't the first time Ecas has operated through a pandemic. In our 100-year history, we've managed to adapt through several significant global events, including the Great Depression, World Wars I and II, and the Spanish Flu. We're committed to supporting disabled people in Edinburgh through this time too."

It was Ecas who pioneered the Dial-a-Cab service which was later taken over by the council and which has been copied all over the UK.

[Ecas](#) has now relaunched its Grants Fund which provides funding for disabled people of any age who live in Edinburgh or the Lothians. This allows anyone who is eligible to apply for funding to pay for items or services that cannot be purchased through welfare benefits. So funding has been provided for student fees, electronic goods – and holidays too. Grants of up to £1500 are available.

We spoke to Ally, who is working from home, but who is really pleased that they are managing to keep a lot of these services going during the pandemic.

You can listen to our chat with him here:

[www.ecas.scot](http://www.ecas.scot)