

### How it started

The relationship between **Scottish Seabird Centre** and **Changes** started when Changes had been awarded funding, from the VCSE health and wellbeing fund, in June 2022 to deliver nature-based activities designed to improve mental wellbeing. The idea for a workshop specifically around bird identification came from Changes participants attending other groups and courses. Changes were also aware of scientific evidence supporting the links between improved mental health and bird watching and listening to bird sounds.

The first session delivered by the Scottish Seabird Centre was held in September 2022 at Musselburgh Lagoons and was delivered as part of Changes **Wellbeing in Nature** course.

Changes, East Lothian, is a mental health charity that has grown from within the community since 1996 to enable people to achieve and maintain good mental health and wellbeing.

The Scottish Seabird Centre is a conservation and education charity that has been helping people to learn about Scotland's marine wildlife, habitats and iconic seabirds for over 20 years.



The Scottish Seabird Centre team led a 4-week block of sessions in North Berwick in November 2022, which included varied activities such as a mindfulness walk, listening to the sounds of nature, beach clean, seaweed search, beachcombing, nurdle hunt, rockpooling and beach art.

Positive feedback from participants led to further collaboration, as it appeared that the values of both charities aligned, to support residents in East Lothian and raise awareness of local marine life.



Changes explained that the four week course was transformative for many participants, some of whom had never been to the Scottish Seabird Centre because they had not had the confidence to go there. They felt that they were given an opportunity for a safe and understanding environment through the collaboration. The course was tailored to be educational, informative, but accessible for those looking to improve their mental health by getting to know the marine life in North Berwick. Typically, participants come to engage with Changes either through either self-referral, or by hearing about the service from their GP, health services, community centres, hospitals, friends and families.

**12 drop-in bird watching events rotating around 4 locations in spring 2023**



One participant shared that she had never known about the environmental impact of nurdles, and that it felt like that collecting nurdles and removing them from the environment was something she could do to help the planet. She had also passed the information on to her daughter's school, and they were planning to do some events to help with cleaning up nurdles. The same participant felt an improvement in all areas of her mental health and said she would recommend it to anyone.

### **Current activity**

The four November sessions prompted a request to run two sessions specifically focussed on seaweed. So two events were scheduled for February and March 2023 to gather, learn about and press local seaweed to create natural artwork. The popularity of bird watching continues and so Changes requested a regular facilitated bird watching drop-in programme running for 12 weeks during spring 2023.

### **Future development plans**

Changes and the Scottish Seabird Centre have now agreed further joint activities for the twelve months beyond the existing programme and are excited to see what the future will bring for the partnership.

