WEST LOTHIAN SERVICE USERS NEWSLETTER

Health	Page
Schizophrenia study	2
Cervical cancer kits	3-4
Lung & Heart MOTs	4-5
Support Services/Groups	
Cruse Scotland	6
W. Lothians Women's aid	7
Sporting memories group	8
General news	
Driving and eye tests	9
Motability scheme update	10-11
Travel insurance	11
New passport checks	12
Energy information	13-14
Screen time for children	14
Benefits	
Disability benefits info.	15-20
Local news	
Stoneyburn hub	20
Whitburn CAB project	21
New gymnastics arena	21-22
Local Groups/Events	
CoWL craft group	22
Music project	23
Social wellbeing group	24
Linlithgow canal centre	25
Craigsfarm event	26
W.L 50+Network ball	27
Mamma mia event	28
VSGWL Volunteer awards	28
Useful contacts	29

Hi! My name is Claire.

Welcome to my Newsletter!

I am a service user with a severe and enduring mental health problem, and I produce Newsletters to help share information about issues people may experience and support available in the West Lothian community.

I am a volunteer for the Mental Health Advocacy Project (MHAP) and a member of their Management Committee. I enjoy researching news and services. If you have any ideas you think may be of interest for future Newsletters, or if you have details about a local service, please contact MHAP on 01506 857230 or email admin@mhap.org.uk

Health

Schizophrenia study

Hearing voices may stem from the brain misreading its own inner speech.

It has been believed for decades that the voices people hear when they have schizophrenia were not external but their own thoughts. Now a study (Schizophrenia Bulletin OCT 25) has provided the strongest evidence yet that this is exactly what happens. In the study EEGs were used which involved recording the brains electrical activity in real time. The study involved 142 participants placed into three groups; These included 55 people with schizophrenia who have had recent auditory hallucinations, 44 people with schizophrenia with no recent hallucinations and a control group of 43 people with no schizophrenia diagnosis. The study involved wearing an EEG cap whilst listening to sounds through headphones. They were asked to imagine silently saying either “bah” or “bih” at the same time as hearing one of these syllables played aloud.

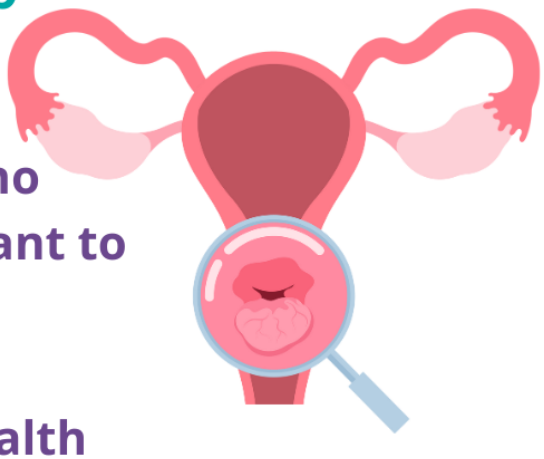
For the healthy participant group brain activity in the auditory cortex reduced when the syllable matched the heard sound. This is a normal response and happens as the brain predicts its own voice. For people with schizophrenia who experienced hallucinations the result was the opposite. Brain activity increased when the syllables matched as though the inner voice were coming from someone else.

Why the voices feel real. The mechanism involved is called corollary discharge. This is a predictive signal the brain sends the auditory cortex just before speaking, internally or aloud. In healthy individuals this signal arrives on time and mutes the expected sound. In those with hallucinations this signal appears to malfunction. Without it the brain is unable to recognise its own inner voice. The result is that internally generated thoughts are processed as though they originate externally. The author of the study Professor Thomas Whitford, Psychologist of the University of Wales said “That might help explain why the voices feel so real”

At the moment there are no tests to identify schizophrenia such as blood tests, scans, or biomarkers. The brainwave patterns seen in the study could, eventually identify the condition. Under study now is how EEGs can be used to identify those at risk. Treatment options such as neurofeedback, brain stimulation or targeted cognitive training could help restore normal corollary discharge function before symptoms become established. Whitford: “we need to further understand the biological cause prior to developing treatments.”

Cervical cancer kits

Cervical cancer progresses slowly. Early detection is key.



In the early stages of disease, there may be no symptoms. It is important to raise public awareness about risk factors, destigmatize sexual health and promote regular screenings.

Screening tests can detect HPV infection and abnormal cell changes that may lead to cervical cancer.

If detected early, treatment has a high rate of successfully curing the patient.

IGCAN INTERNATIONAL GYNECOLOGIC CANCER ADVOCACY NETWORK

IGCS INTERNATIONAL GYNECOLOGIC CANCER SOCIETY

The government has launched a pilot programme offering HPV self-sampling kits to women so that they can test themselves for cervical cancer. At the moment women aged 25 and 64 are invited for a smear test every 5 years. Unfortunately, many women don't go for their smear test as they are uncomfortable with the procedure. Figures show that in the year 2024/25 only 41.9% of Scottish women attended their appointment within 6 months of getting their letter. The kits are being offered to women who have either never attended their appointment or have rarely attended. The new scheme will run across 22 GP practices in four health boards initially with the plan being to accommodate 17,000 women. Health boards chosen include NHS Lothian and were selected due to increased levels of deprivation. The kits allow women to obtain their sample themselves without the

need for a GP appointment. These women will be over 30 years and have never attended their screening or who have not made their appointment for at least six years. This gives women another option to normal screening and they can decide if they would prefer the self-sampling kit. If a woman receives a positive result for HPV, they will then require a standard smear. Cervical cancer is preventable, so it is so vital that if you are offered the kit to use it. It could save your life. This pilot is part of Scotland's cervical cancer elimination action plan to eliminate HPV by 2040. The government also plans to transform gynaecology services and improve support for women.

You can view the original article at the following link.
www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/health/scottish-government-launches-self-sampling-36919070

Lung and heart health MOT's

The SNP has pledged that if they are re-elected in MAY that they open centres that will offer MOTs for lung and heart health. These will be located in football stadiums, shopping centres, workplaces, and pharmacies across the country. Tests for Scots will be to detect cancer, COPD and heart disease with the aim being to reduce pressure on the NHS and detect problems at an early stage. Those at risk will be identified and support offered. There is already an early intervention programme delivering services across the country. The plan is to expand these services through partnership with a range of local organisations in our communities. These services will offer check-ups and advice which will hopefully encourage people to come forward, particularly in disadvantaged communities. The SNP has successfully reduced waiting times for outpatients and inpatients in the past 9 months. Latest data shows a 63% fall in outpatient waiting times in the past 12 months. The number of GPs is rising in Scotland along with expansion of GP walk-in centres.

Scotland is an ageing population so keeping people healthier is even more important.

NHS Lothian

Visit the New Health Screening NHS Lothian Website

The website includes:

- Step-by-step guides "Social Stories"
- Informative videos and images
- Multiple Language Translations
- Sign Language Support
- Accessability Tool Support



Scan the QR code or visit:
https://services.nhslothian.scot/healthscreening/

Support Services/ groups

Cruse Scotland



Cruse Scotland offers bereavement support in Scotland. We all experience the loss of someone in our lives, and it can overwhelm us. Experienced volunteers provide free support and have received excellent training. There is an online grief support team that you can chat with to help you understand, process, and navigate your grief. There is also a free helpline; 0808 802 6161.

Additional Support for adults.

- Access information on the website on understanding grief
- Early support in first 6 months through 1:1 group sessions
- One-to-one bereavement counselling (6 months after death)
- Coping with anxiety self-care leaflets
- Free, online bereavement support package for adults who have lost someone

People can also email support@crusescotland.org.uk

Support for young people

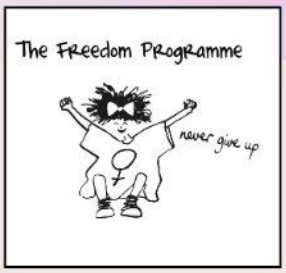
- Access information about grief in the young
- Self-care leaflets
- 1:1 bereavement support for children
- Bereavement helpline; 0808 802 6161

West Lothian Women's aid

WEST LOTHIAN WOMEN'S AID

FREEDOM PROGRAMME

SCOTTISH CHARITABLE ORG - SC046887



By the end of the programme participants will be confident in their ability to recognise early warning signs of an abusive partner, and how this is different from a healthy relationship.

We Can Help

The Freedom Programme is an awareness raising group programme, facilitated by trained survivors of Domestic Abuse. This is made available by West Lothian Women's Aid to empower & support women to move on from their experiences.

Recognise any of the below within your relationship?

- Walking on eggshells
- Frightened & Controlled
- Isolated & Low
- Kept away from friends & family
- Controlling how you spend money
- Controlling what work you do
- Being constantly checked up on
- Criticised & Disrespected
- Told what to wear, how to look & behave
- Acts of violence within the relationship
- Children being turned against you
- Friends, family or children being used to obtain information about you

If so, you are experiencing Domestic Abuse.

Attending The Freedom Programme

We run several sessions throughout the year, by Zoom or Face to Face. We offer childcare provision for our face to face sessions, and always aim to remove any barriers to ensure you can attend. The programme is free of charge. For more information please call or email us on the details below.

01506 413 721
Mon-Fri - 9am - 4pm

Get in touch for more info or to join or next group

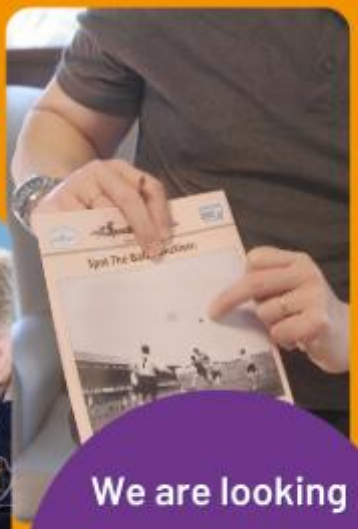
info@wlwa.org.uk

Lothian Centre for inclusive living new group, Sporting Memories– volunteering opportunity

Would you like to make a difference in the lives of older people in and around West Lothian?







Full training and support is given to all our volunteers

We are looking for volunteers to support our weekly club in Whitburn

We welcome volunteers of all backgrounds and abilities, sports fans or not, to help with running our sessions for members, from making teas and coffees to creating quizzes. As a volunteer you will:

- Make new friends
- Make a positive difference to our members
- Enjoy inclusive activities and good humour
- Gain insights into working with older people
- Be part of a nationwide group of like-minded individuals

Club sessions will take place at Polkemmet Lodge, 7a East Main Street, Whitburn every Tue 10.30am - 12pm

To chat about the role contact Donna at Sporting Memories: donna.mackey@sportingmemories.uk / 07921512316

General news

Driving – New eye tests



More than 37,000 UK drivers have lost their licence due to failing the new eye standard or indeed not bothering to take the test at all. This was found by one of the Uks largest motor retailers Marshall motor group. The law states that drivers must be able to read a standard vehicle number plate from 20m away. This is around 5 parked cars. Both glasses and contact lenses can be worn. So, if a driver fails the test, police officers can directly inform the DVLA who will launch a review, and they will no longer be able to drive. Since 2022 around 32,944 motorists no longer meet the required standard. In addition, 4,177 bus and lorry drivers have also had their licence removed since 2022. Deterioration in eyesight tends to occur gradually so it is important that you have a regular eye test with an optician. Anyone can experience changes in their sight so you must look after your vision regardless of your age. Data shows that older people are more likely to fail their eye test, however, 6,500 drivers under 55 years old also lost their licence due to vision problems, so, indeed changes in eyesight can also affect younger people. Across the 4 year period data indicates that drivers aged 40-69 account for the majority of licence losses. It is the case that employers are not obliged to arrange additional routine eye tests.

You can pay your road tax via Gov.uk, over the phone or at the Post Office. If you buy a used car you must tax it immediately, even if you pay zero.

Motability scheme changes



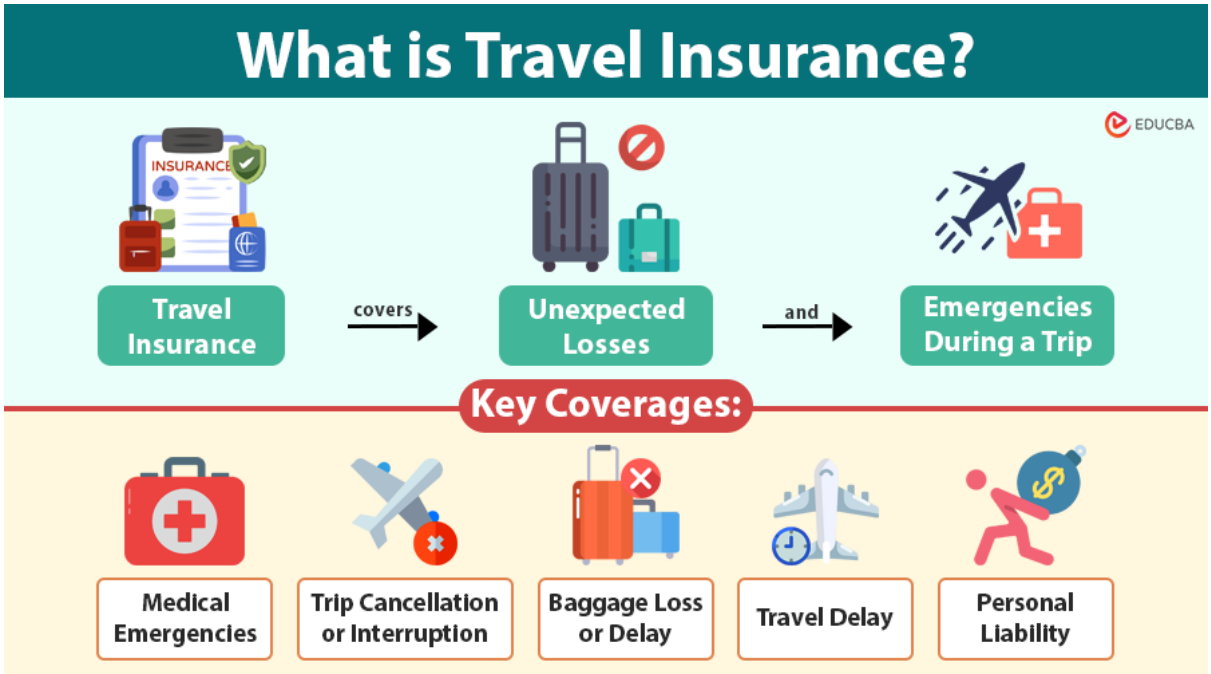
Major Motability changes are coming in July that may drive costs up for many. From Wednesday 1st July 2026 for the majority of new leases VAT and insurance Premium tax will apply. The mileage allowance is changing. It will be 30,000 miles for a new 3-year lease. On average motorists drive around 7,500 a year. New leases will include tyre replacements. 6 tyres can be replaced during a three year lease, up to 4 for damage. For breakdowns in the EU, you will require a VE103 certificate before travelling. You must pay an admin fee for the VE103 certificate for all new orders. You can still get cover from the RAC.

If you already have a lease, nothing is changing. Things that are not changing with your lease. It will still include.

- Insurance for up to three drivers
- Servicing and maintenance
- Breakdown cover
- Dedicated support from team.

For any questions about changes you can contact the Motability customer services team on 0300 456 4566. There is also a web manager. Visit www.motability.co.uk. There are also contact forms online.

Travel information



It is important that you purchase travel insurance as soon as possible after you book your holiday to ensure you are covered for things such as lost luggage or medical emergencies. You travel insurance could be invalidated if you travel against advice from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Just now the FCDO advises against all but essential travel to the United Arab Emirates. For detailed information and advice on foreign travel insurance you can visit the Gov.uk website. It is also recommended that you review FCDO travel advice and register for alerts for your destination.

New passport checks



From 10th April new passport checks were introduced for Europe. There is now a new entry/exit system (EES). This is a digital, biometric system for non-EU travellers (including Brits) visiting the EU/Schengen area. It is replacing manual passport stamping with digital fingerprint/photo recording to track entry and exit. Upon the first visit, travellers will have their fingerprints scanned and a photo taken at the border, along with passport scans. This could mean longer waits at the border initially. Later in the year a separate, online visa-waiver system called ETIAS (similar to US ESTA) is set to launch for a fee of £20. For more information visit www.gov.uk

Energy information

What is the energy price cap?

On the 27th May, the Government will release the July price cap based on Ofgem's reports. This means your bills will be protected until then, as the April to June price cap has already been decided.

The **price cap** is a way of smoothing out these price spikes, delaying the offset costs from reaching consumers.



Why are bills going up?

Bills are set to rise again due to the price cap increase being put into effect on the 1st July 2026.

Why is this happening?

- Conflict in the Middle East
- Attacks on energy sites in Iran and Qatar



According to **End Fuel Poverty**, UK gas prices have already sky rocketed 124% month-on-month and up to 65% year-on-year, peaking since the conflict started in February.



The Ofgem energy price cap has fallen from April from £1,758 to £1,641. This cap will run from 3 months until July when prices will rise again due to the Iran war. The July price cap is now £1,929 a year for an average household which is an increase of 18%. Note, the price cap does not put a limit on how much you pay, it sets the maximum unit rates and standing charges, and it represents what an average customer can expect to pay. In addition, where you live can affect your bill as unit rates differ depending on area. Different rates are in place for prepayment customers and if you pay when you receive your bill. The price cap covers anyone on a standard variable rate tariff. There are 33 million customers on SVR accounts, which includes six million prepayment meters. To

What can YOU do to help reduce bills?

Behavioural changes:

- Be aware of your energy usage using a smart meter
- If you don't have a smart meter, submit meter readings regularly to your energy company
- Take shorter showers
- Turning down the temperature controls
- Setting the thermostat to heat your home only when needed
- Finding the cheapest energy tariff by switching providers



Small-scale changes:

- Switch to LED lightbulbs
- Install radiator foils
- Fit draft proofing

(These can be bought from most DIY stores)

find out what tariff you are on you should contact your energy supplier. If you are on a fixed rate your energy supplier will notify you of any changes.

Guidance on Screen time for children



At the moment parents are struggling with the cost of living along with closed public services. They often work long hours and to cope many families turn to the TV remote or tablet. The government has now issued guidance on how long parents can let children watch the TV. Children under 5 years old should have only 1 hour of screen time a day. For under two's, they should not be left alone, and they must have as little screen time as possible. This helps support development and protects children from harmful material. Advice also states to not access social media-style videos and toys, or those sites using AI. A bedtime story at night is much more beneficial.

Evidence suggests that 90% of brain growth happens before 5 years of age and that the new guidelines in place are there to help families. It can be difficult as screens are everywhere. The UK is also considering limiting or indeed ban social media for under-16s.

Screen time limits the chance that children have in having good development, which is sleep, being physically active and limits opportunities for creative play and social interaction with parents. Some parents notice a change in behaviour when using screens and have found that it discouraged play between siblings. When screens are removed children often find other things to do. The government support aims to support families to limit screen time and allow children to have the best childhood possible.

Benefits

Information on child benefit



Some households are not aware that child benefit can be claimed until the age of 20 years. The HMRC wants to let families know that payments don't have to stop at 16 years. If your child is between the ages of 16-19 and is still in full-time education or training child benefit can be awarded until 20 years of age. You must notify the HMRC once a child reached 16 if they are going to remain in education or training. You can do this via the app or online. You can find out more at www.gov.uk/child-benefit-16-19



If you are a child under 16 years of age or up to 20 years and are still in education or training, you may qualify for child benefit. There is no limit on the number of children that you can make a claim for. 11.9 million children are supported in the UK by this benefit, so it is well worth checking if you qualify. Child benefit can be used in a variety of ways to cover daily costs, put in a Junior ISA, child's university costs, or a first car. Child benefit is means tested so higher earners start to lose payments once their income exceeds £60,000. Once the threshold of £80,000 is exceeded, all payments stop entirely.

Claiming child benefit gives you NI contributions (NICS) which count towards your state pension (as long as your child is under 12 years). If you have stopped work to care for a child, this is especially valuable. So, to ensure you receive NICs you should register for child benefit. You lose 1% of child benefit for every £200 of income you earn over the £60,000 threshold. HMRC does not automatically adjust the benefit amount high earners receive. You will get the full amount and must return the excess by filling in a self-assessment tax return. There is an online service that you can use to make your claim.

In Scotland there is additional support provided for families via the Scottish child payment through Social Security Scotland. It is a weekly payment of £28.20 and is paid every 4 weeks for every eligible child under 16 years. You must receive certain benefits to qualify. For more information visit www.gov.uk Support has been given to over 241,000 parents and carers and over£1.4 billion has been given to families on a low income. There is a plan to increase this payment for children under one during 2027/28. This will mean an extra £500 each year for a child who qualifies.

Carer benefits update





As from March there will be a new additional person payment for carers who provide care to more than one person.

Carer's allowance supplement has replaced Scottish carer supplement providing more consistent support.



Financial support will be extended for carers after the person they look after dies.

These new rules will mean better access to support during breaks in care.

Social security Scotland will write to carers who get carer support payment to let them know about improvements.

Social security Scotland survey

A new survey by SSS has found that stigma about claiming financial support stops people from applying. Three quarters of people believed that being on benefits is portrayed negatively by the media and/or politicians. It was also found that almost 40% people are being judged negatively by their own family and friends. During February and March this year SSS ran a Tackling stigma community campaign which included TV advertising, social media and sharing peoples experiences.

Disability benefits update



From Thursday 9th April people who claim disability benefits will be able to try employment without the fear of losing their benefits. More than a third of people who are disabled or have health conditions according to a DWP survey actually want to work but don't want to lose their benefits so don't apply for any jobs. Reassessments for people claiming new-style ESA, PIP and UC health element will therefore not be triggered. This new legislation includes those who want to volunteer. This legislation is backed by a £3.5 billion investment in employment support by the end of the decade. The government wants to boost living standards for the sick or disabled and improve mental health. The government will save around £1 billion by introducing a lower health element of UC which will also encourage people to work. For ongoing information visit www.gov.uk

ADP and terminal illness



ADP provides financial support if you have received a terminal illness diagnosis. It is for those aged between 16 and state pension age. Your applications will be fast-tracked, and you will receive the maximum award. To apply there will be a shortened form to fill in, and you will need confirmation of your illness from a Doctor or nurse, and they must also submit a "Benefits assessment under special rules in Scotland" form. A SR1 form or DS1500 form will also be accepted. If you require information on terminal illness this is available online at www.mygov.scot/terminal-illness To check if you qualify for related benefits, services, and premiums you should visit www.mygov.scot/adult-disability-payment If you are already getting ADP and have received a terminal diagnosis you can contact SSS free on 0800 182 2222.

For more information and to apply for ADP online visit www.mygov.scot/benefits. You can also apply over the phone or request a paper application form call 0800 182 2222. There is webchat at www.chat.socialsecurity.gov.scot

You can access further support from the independent advocacy service www.Advocacy.scot operated by Advice direct Scotland. Call 0808 196 8901, or email support@advocacy.scot

Child disability payment



Child disability payment helps care for a child who is disabled and also if they have a terminal illness. It has two parts, care, and mobility. The mobility part is only for children aged 3 and over. A BASRiS form (to confirm if someone is terminally ill) must be completed by a Doctor or nurse. DS1500 or SRI forms are also accepted. You can speak to a client advisor on 0800 182 2222. Your application will be fast-tracked. To find out more and apply online at www.mygov.scot/benefits You can request an application form or use webchat www.chatsocialsecurity.gov.scot

There is a cost of living website for information on support for families. Visit www.gov.scot/costoflivingsupport

Local news

Stoneyburn hub



Funding has been provided from the Regeneration capital grant fund (Scottish Government). In addition to the £3.1 million already allocated there will be an extra £1.2 million to build a larger centre. The community will be involved in the design process producing a modern facility for community groups and events. The current education centre is being demolished.

Whitburn CAB financial inclusion project



The Citizens advice bureaus Whitburn financial inclusion project has proved to be a vital hub providing support for local residents. The service has reached over 5,000 clients providing guidance, advice, and advocacy. The service has reached more than £1.85 million in financial gains. Advice offered includes benefits, housing, and support in a crisis. The project has moved to Whitburn community centre, manse road, Whitburn.

New gymnastics arena



There will be a new, dedicated home for gymnastics in West Lothian which will open this June. The former indoor bowling hall has been developed into a facility for gymnastics; indeed, a £330,000 investment has been made to create the new arena. There has been much interest in West Lothian for gymnastics in recent years (a 170% increase). Opportunities will be provided for children, young people, and families in the local community. Sessions available currently are running at almost full capacity with waiting lists operating. The new facility will expand capacity and allow more people to take part for beginners and at club and competitive levels. The new area will have specialist equipment, learning zones and will allow multiple programmes to run at the same time. The new project will provide

new employment and training opportunities. This will include a dedicated gymnastics development officer and up to 16 new coaching positions. Xcite runs a “become a coach” programme allows local people to become gymnastics coaches. The new facility will support schools and community groups providing opportunities to get active and to build confidence in those people that take part. West Lothian Council has made the project possible.

For details of programmes at the Bathgate Gymnastics arena and how to register for classes will be announced before the arena opens in June visit Xcite’s website. www.westlothianleisure.com

Local groups/Events

Carers of West Lothian craft group



Music Project



Social wellbeing group



Linlithgow canal centre museum and cruises



Summer mindfulness session Craigsfarm development project



In March Aga delivered a spring mindfulness session at Craigsfarm. It offered a 2 hour gentle space to relax and included gentle yoga, breathing and meditation and a sound bath. Those who attended the session were extremely positive saying how it helped reduce stress and anxiety, allowed connection with their bodies and provided a moment just to be still. Aga will be offering a summer mindfulness session. Dates are still to be confirmed. You can join the waiting list now. admin@craigsfarm.org.uk

West Lothian 50+ Network charity Ball



The West Lothian 50+ Network is hosting a charity ball this Summer. It is for members, supporters, and the wider community. It is taking place on Friday 5th June at Almondvale Suite, Livingston FC from 6.30pm – midnight. The event supports the charities aim to reduce loneliness and strengthen social connection in West Lothian. Event tickets will contribute to the aims of the charity. On the evening there will be a, buffet, fundraising activities, DJ, and dancing. Tickets are available on the following link https://events.humantix.com/summer-celebration.../ticket Tickets are also available at the hub, 14 George street, Bathgate.

Mamma mia outdoor cinema event



The film Mamma mia is being shown at the outdoor cinema in the grounds of Callender house in Falkirk. It is an all singing and dancing ABBA experience in an amazing setting with a massive outdoor screen. There will be a street food bar and disco before and after the film. The event is taking place on Saturday May 23rd from 6pm-10.30pm. Under 16s must be accompanied by an adult. You can bring along a picnic if you wish. Advance booking is highly recommended. If it is fully booked you can check out other events on offer this year. For full information and to book visit www.eventbrite.co.uk Information is also available on www.adventurecinema.co.uk/venues/callender-house

VSGWL Volunteer awards



Due to the success of last year's event, there will be a Volunteer awards ceremony this year and will be taking place on Thursday 4th June. It is part of Volunteers' week (Mon, 1st June – Sun 7th June 2026). It will celebrate the work of volunteers across West Lothian. It will bring together volunteers, organisations, and partners to say thank you. In the coming months, more details will be shared on nominations, award categories and how to get involved.



Useful contacts

Advice shop	01506 283000 www.westlothian.gov.uk
Breathing Space	0800 83 85 87 www.breathingspace.scot
Carers of West Lothian	01506 448000 www.carers-westlothian.com
Citizens Advice Bureau	01506 432 977 www.cabwestlothian.org.uk
Cruse Scotland	0808 802 6161 www.crusescotland.org.uk
West Lothian Council	01506 280000 www.westlothian.gov.uk
Craigsfarm community hub	01506 894639 www.craigsfarm.org.uk
Generation Arts	07521 358 239 www.generationarts.co.uk
Home energy Scotland	01506 635 510 www.homeenergyscotland.org
Linlithgow canal centre	01506 840574 www.lucs.org.uk
LCiL	0131 475 2350 www.lothiancil.org.uk
Samaritans	116 123 www.samaritans.org
Stoneyburn hub	01506 374132 www.sbvg.com
Voluntary Sector Gateway	01506 650 111 www.voluntarysectorgateway.org
West Lothian 50+ Network	01506 635 510 www.westlothian50+network.co.uk
West Lothian Women's aid	01506 413 721 www.wlwa.org.uk
Westspace West Lothian	www.westspace.org.uk