WEST LOTHIAN SERVICE USERS NEWSLETTER

November 2026 issue

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Hi! My name is Claire.

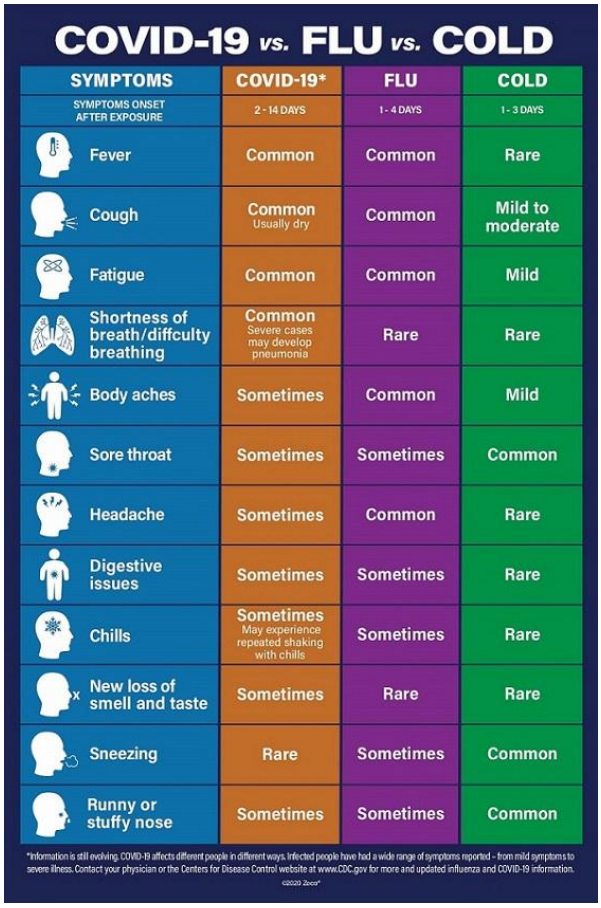
Welcome to my Newsletter!

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

Cold and flu



Symptoms of cold and flu are similar. Those with the flu however appear quickly and include aching muscles, runny or blocked nose and a sore throat. With children vomiting and diarrhoea can also happen. Usually, a cold is milder than flu and appears more gradually. With flu you may have a high temperature, headache and extreme tiredness and need a few days in bed. You should feel better after about a week. A cold will last one or two weeks.

Causes of flu

Flu is caused by influenza viruses which spread easily between people via droplets produced when a person coughs or sneezes. You can also become infected from contaminated hands or surfaces and then transfer it to your mouth, nose, or eyes. It is highly infectious with the first five days being the time when you are likely to pass it on. A cold is caused by more than 200 different viruses the most common being rhinoviruses.

Recovery from flu

It is recommended that you rest and sleep. You should take paracetamol or Ibuprofen for a high temperature and aches and pains. You can visit your pharmacy for flu remedies. If you are over 65, pregnant or with a long-term health condition or have a weakened immune system you can contact NHS111 for medical advice. Try and stay at home and avoid contact with others.

Flu prevention

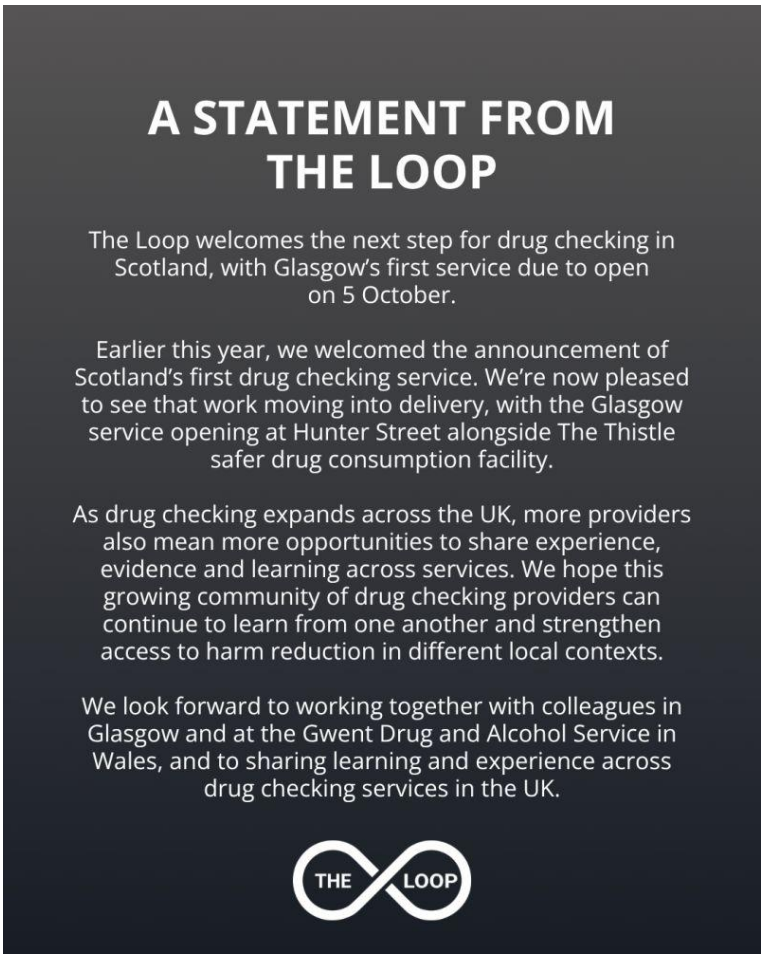
To prevent flu the vaccine is recommended. It is offered to people who are more likely to become seriously ill from the virus and includes over 65s, people with certain long term health conditions and young children. Having good hygiene can help reduce flu and other respiratory viruses spreading.

Flu and covid

Flu and Covid-19 both produce similar symptoms including a high temperature, sore throat, and aching body. There has been a particular variant of covid-19 XFG, “American Covid” which has been circulating for around a year. Symptoms appear after 5 to 6 days following exposure with symptoms lasting for up to 2 weeks. With flu people usually feel unwell for a few days with symptoms experienced for around 5 days. The flu can also leave you tired for an additional 2 or three weeks.

Covid symptoms are usually more intense than flu. The NHS lists overlapping symptoms including fever, cough, headaches, and muscle aches. Symptoms by themselves cannot therefore confirm which virus you have. A covid test is needed to check accurately. You can no longer get covid-19 tests for free on the NHS. You can, however, still buy lateral flow, PCR, and antibody tests online. Those who are at the highest risk of becoming seriously unwell may still qualify for a free lateral flow test through participating pharmacies.

Drug deaths in West Lothian



The number of people losing their lives to drugs has increased across Scotland. In West Lothian last year 39 people died and the figure is 1,133 nationwide. Indeed, since 2024 in West Lothian drug deaths have increased by 77.3%. As a result, action needs to be taken to end the crisis which will involve fully funding addiction services and for Holyrood to recognise the increasing dangers of new and synthetic drugs such as synthetic opioids like nitazenes. There is also the plan to have more drug consumption rooms which includes West Lothian as they have been demonstrated to save lives. In the last year, the government has funded more than 1,100 residential rehabilitation placements and have improved access to treatment and lifesaving naloxone. There is now a new alcohol and drugs strategic plan in place along with taking steps to improve links between treatments, housing, and other services. Support will be targeted to at-risk communities. In Scotland there is a new drug-checking service in Glasgow (which opened in October this year) as well as the safer drug consumption facility.

Support in West Lothian

To access support, you can visit your GP to access treatment. You could also contact the West Lothian drug and alcohol service (WLDAS) yourself. You can call 01506 430225 to make an appointment. WLDAS also operates Breakaway Recovery clinics, which are

drop- in services across the region which run alongside the NHS Addictions service and social work addictions team. You can access treatment without an appointment. WLDAS is based in Almondbank centre, Sheil Walk, Livingston. You can also call the community addictions team on 01506 282844/45 and is based in the Civic Centre, Howden, Livingston. For full details of support available in West Lothian visit www.westlothian.gov.uk/article/72294/Alcohol-Drug-Awareness

Winter benefits

Warm home discount scheme



In Scotland, this year more households will qualify for the warm home discount. The discount provides a £150 discount for those who qualify. To receive the discount this year households must meet requirements on the qualifying date which is August 23rd, 2026. Some people may not get the payment automatically and may need to apply. This is the case in Scotland where people may need to apply directly to their energy supplier. Letters will be sent to eligible households by January next year giving information and what to do. A claim can be made until March 31st, 2027. For help people can call the warm home discount helpline now on 0800 030 9322. The system in Scotland involves eligible households being divided into two categories called the core group and broader group. With the core group changes have been made so many more people will get the payment automatically. Also, those in the core group must receive certain benefits. Those people in the broader group may need to apply directly to their energy supplier. The discount is

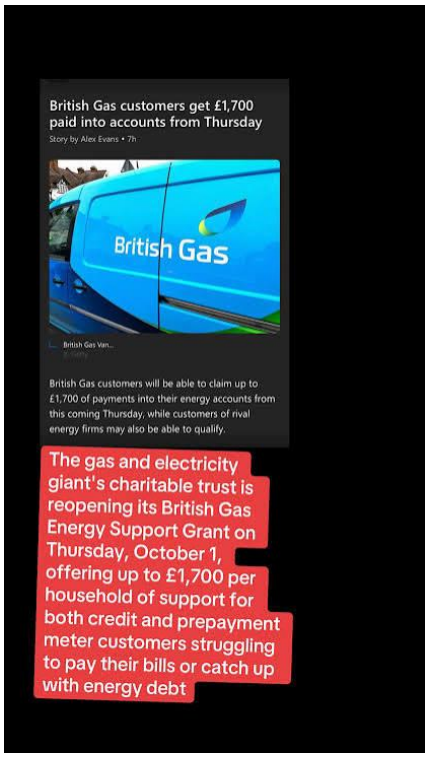
paid to a person's energy account. Normally this is usually an electricity account. If needed, people can request the payment to be made to their gas account. For prepayment customers they will receive credit or a voucher or cheque. For more information, including eligibility and the process in Scotland you can visit www.GOV.UK

Christmas bonus payment



For people on certain benefits, they will receive the modest Christmas bonus payment this year. It is worth £10 and will be paid into bank accounts in December. Qualifying benefits include carer's allowance and pension credit. If you only receive Universal credit, you will not get the payment. You must receive a qualifying benefit in the qualifying week, usually the first full week of December. The payment is paid automatically with no need to apply. The bonus may appear as "DWP XB" on your bank statement.

British Gas energy support grant



For households struggling with their energy bills they may qualify for a British Gas energy trusts energy support grant. This is worth up to £1,700 and lets people clear any debts. This scheme is for those using prepayment meters and credit accounts. Those applying must meet certain criteria. Prepayment meter customers must owe between £50 and £1,700. Those with a credit account must owe between £100 and £1,700. Debts for an account that has been closed which includes following a house move or a change of supplier are not included in the scheme. In addition, households must have not received a British Gas energy grant in the past two years, and they must have received advice for debt in the past six months. Those who haven't had advice can use a self-help benefits calculator as part of the application process. You must also have a household income under £25,000. You will qualify if someone in the household is registered disabled and receive certain disability benefits or you get Carer's allowance. Households with three or more children may qualify as well as single-person households and lone parents with less than three children. If you are experiencing fuel poverty you may also qualify.

British Gas customers and other energy suppliers can apply for the grant. If you are with OVO, Boost, E.ON Next, EDF, SP, Octopus, Shell Energy, SSE, Utility Warehouse and Sainsbury's Energy you will need to apply to your own suppliers support fund first. To find more information and apply you can go through the British Gas Energy Trusts online application portal. For further help you can contact the West Lothian advice shop and Citizens advice and organisations such as Turn2Us.

Energy support

To check if you are paying the right amount for your energy, you can contact the Citizen's Advice Bureau's (CAB) money talk team They offer free money and debt advice. They can make sure you are claiming all the benefits and financial support you are entitled to and how to manage debt. You can also find out how to save money on your bills. You can access information on the CAB website at www.cabwestlothian.org.uk or call the money talk team on 0800 028 1456. You can also book an appointment via the website or call the Livingston branch on 01506 432 977.



You can also access help via West Lothian councils advice shop. They offer energy assistance including pre-payment meter vouchers, payment plans, and resolving billing disputes. They provide guidance with lowering household energy costs.

How to access help. There are in-person drop-ins at various community centres across West Lothian. (including Bathgate, Broxburn, Fauldhouse and Livingston). You can call to book an appointment on 01506 283000 or email adviceshop@westlothian.gov.uk or visit www.westlothian.gov.uk for more information.

Pension age winter heating payment



The Pension age winter heating payment is issued by Social Security Scotland and replaces the winter fuel payment in Scotland. The payment is worth between £105.55 and £316.70 and the amount awarded depends on age, household status and if you receive qualifying benefits. To qualify you must be born on or before 27th June 1960 (reaching state pension age by the qualifying week of 21st to 27th September 2026) and live in Scotland during that week. For most people, the payment is automatic. If your individual taxable income is over £35,000 HMRC will reclaim the full amount once it's paid. You can choose to opt out of the payment. Payments start in November this year. Letters will be sent out before payments are issued. It may appear as the reference code "PAWHP" on your bank statement.

Winter heating payment



The winter heating payment has replaced the cold weather payment in Scotland. This is a one off payment of £62 and is for people on low incomes and who are on certain benefits. Most people will get the payment automatically with no need to apply. Qualifying benefits include Pension credit, income-related ESA and Universal credit. You can check if you qualify at www.mygov.scot/help-energy-bills

Child winter heating payment



The child winter heating payment helps disabled children, young people and their families who may need extra help with heating. It is worth £265.50 and is paid once a year. For most this is an automatic payment. To check if you qualify you can visit www.mygov.scot/help-energy-bills

West Lothian schoolbank winter clothing appeal



It is estimated that the West Lothian schoolbank charity this year will receive over 500 requests for winter jackets. The jackets are so important for children for their comfort in the cold, allowing them to play and join in with school activities and to focus on learning. There are several ways you can help. You could become a sponsor. You will purchase a brand-new jacket or a winter clothing pack for a specific child. When a referral comes in the schoolbank will contact you with the details and you can shop for the child directly. You can also purchase a jacket (4-12 years old) which you can then donate. Jackets are then issued as referrals come in. You can donate money if you are short of time and a jacket will be bought on your behalf. Usually, a jacket costs around £25 but any donation will help. Requests are also frequently received for new black, grey, or white socks and tights, hoodies, wellies, gloves and hats and cosy socks. You can also donate gently used jackets or wellies. For more information and drop-off locations you can visit www.schoolbank-westlothian.org

Octopus energy – free electric blankets for customers



Octopus energy is giving customers free electric blankets. The aim is to support those in need including vulnerable individuals and people with specific medical needs. Usually, these blankets cost around £50 but you can save around £300 a year as you are not constantly having your heating on. It has been found that heating your own home costs around £4 a day. Having an energy -efficient blanket could keep you warm for just 2-4p an hour. If you have mobility issues or are more prone to illness an electric blanket is a really good idea if you want to stay warm on a budget. The are also safe to use. To apply you should fill in Octopus energy's "financial assistance tool" and it will take around a week for a decision to be made. From August, more than 110,000 have already been sent to customers in need. The supplier aims to issue one blanket per home. If you can they state that you should purchase your own blanket so the company can target those who cannot afford one themselves.

As well as Octopus energy, OVO Energy are offering free electric blankets and heated throws to eligible, vulnerable customers. OVO energy has an Extra support Package and is distributing free heated throws, mattress toppers, smart plugs, and home efficiency kits to customers that are struggling with their energy bills. This includes those customers who have medical needs. The scheme is now open for applications. Other suppliers such as EDF, E.ON Next and British Gas offer hardship funds, debt relief, or replacement appliances, like heaters and slow cookers. It is recommended that you apply as soon as possible (allocations are limited) to check if you qualify on your suppliers website.

Local news/groups

Ratho Christmas canal cruises



Bookings are now open for Christmas canal cruises with the seagull Trust at Ratho. These Christmas cruises are free and are open to anyone with special needs, a disability (physical or learning), or a life – limiting illness. Groups that are eligible include elderly groups from care homes or day centres, children and adults with mobility issues and support groups and schools catering for individuals with additional support needs. The cruises are running from Monday 30th November to Tuesday 15th December They will take place daily from 10.30am to around 12.15pm and 1pm till around 2.45pm. There are 3 boats which accommodate up to 12 people which includes up to 4 wheelchair users. There is also a lift and an accessible toilet. Refreshments are available onboard. Young passengers will receive a small gift from Santa. Adults can bring their own presents which Santa will hand out. For more information and to book you can email SGTsantacruises@outlook.com or call 07749034468. Note that if the weather is severe trips may be cancelled. It is recommended that groups book early.

Glasgow and Clyde rape crisis centre

Glasgow and Clyde rape crisis centre desperately needs funds, or they may need to cut services soon. Anyone, including businesses and organisations are being urged to donate. They have already had to close some of its waiting lists for specialised support. Those who have experienced rape and sexual violence in February this year faced a wait of up to 226 days. There has been a considerable increase in sexual crimes in Scotland with16,430 crimes recorded in 2025/26. This is the highest number since records began in 1971. In Glasgow, a rape or attempted rape is reported to the police around every 18 hours. The director of the rape crisis centre in Glasgow, Claudia Macdonald-Bruce said, for the past 50 years, the centre has “sat alongside women and girls at their darkest

moments" but they are now "seeing the consequences of a system buckling under pressure". The centre wants to continue to provide free specialised support to women and girls. To support a survivor costs from £271 but specialist help is closer to £500. Claudia: "We cannot change what has happened to a survivor. But we can change what happens next. Women and girls deserve better, and we will be here for them at every turn- but we need help to do that." The aim for the centre is to raise funds by November 27. To donate and to receive fundraising information for the Glasgow centre you can visit www.glasgowclyderapecrisis.org.uk

Support in West Lothian

There is support available in West Lothian for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence. West Lothian council has a domestic abuse and sexual assault team (DASAT) which offers specialised free support and advocacy to adults and children. This includes

- Safety planning
- Emotional and practical support
- Advice/advocacy information
- Contacts for other services
- Support through the court process

You can access support via self-referrals via phone or email, or via third parties such as Social work, police, and voluntary services. New referrals can contact DASAT@westlothian.gov.uk . Note a waiting list operates. The team is based at the Civic centre, Howden, Livingston. You can call 01506 281055.

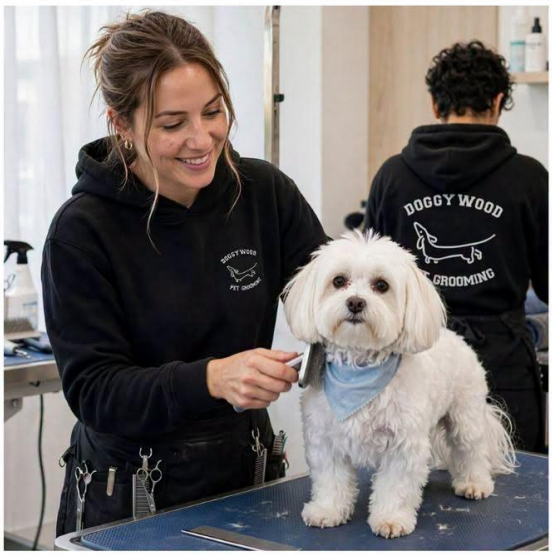
West Lothian food Network



West Lothian foodbank is now in partnership with Jamie Oliver's ministry of food. The aim is to help communities in West Lothian develop the skills to cook healthy, affordable meals. The hope is to create a network of trainers which can pass on cooking skills and education around food across the county. The training is to be based at the Larder, a local social enterprise. Nine people will participate in the programme from organisations across the region. There will be a focus on practical skills in cooking and eating healthily on a budget. There will be access to recipes, nutritional information, and resources on resources on healthy eating. The ultimate aim is to allow people to cook tasty, nutritious food from scratch which will support the health and wellbeing of the local community.

Spark charity

HELP US MAKE A DIFFERENCE











Spark is a non-profit charity based in Craigshill, Livingston. Our core mission is to support the local community, with a particular focus on tackling loneliness and social isolation.

Spark Creations is the social enterprise arm of Spark. We offer a wide and varied selection of customisable products for companies, groups, and individuals who value social impact. Our range includes branded merchandise such as T-shirts and hoodies in a variety of colours, as well as mugs, water bottles, coasters, keyrings and much more.

We can fulfil both individual and bulk orders, with discounts available for larger quantities. Whether you're looking for a one-off gift or stocking up for an event or team, Spark Creations can deliver high-quality items with a purpose.

When you buy from Spark Creations, every penny goes directly back into Spark-supporting our vital work and helping us maintain a safe, welcoming community hub for those who need it most.

CONTACT US

Support your brand & the Spark community.

01506 442093

2 ALMONDBANK, CRAIGSHILL, LIVINGSTON, EH54 5EJ

PAULINE@SPARKSCOT.COM

OSCR Scottish Charity Regulator www.oscr.org.uk Registered SCIO SC007280

Sporting memories club



The sporting memories club meets every Monday morning from 10.30am until 12noon at Livingston cricket club in Murieston valley. Sporting memories believes in the power of sharing stories around sport. It allows people to reconnect and support their mental wellbeing and living a healthy life. It also reduces isolation and loneliness. The charity supports a wide range of people over 50 years old including those with dementia and depression including long term conditions and disabilities . Those attending have the chance to participate in inclusive activities such as the sticky darts game which is extremely popular along with quizzes, games, and light physical movement. A small donation is required to cover refreshments. The club has a brilliant archive of memories of sport shared by sports stars and members of the public. To join the club, you can refer yourself or via a third party. You can also just drop in. If you are looking to volunteer there is online training available which takes around 3 hours. This is taking place on Monday the 30th November from 1.30pm – 5pm.

There is also a sporting memories group in Broxburn united sports club which takes place every Wednesday from 10.30am until 12pm. At the moment there is a waiting list in place.

Events

Drop-in event for unpaid carers



A drop-in event is taking place for unpaid carers from 1pm till 3pm on Thursday 19th November at Strathbrock Partnership centre. It is being hosted by Carers of West Lothian and West Lothian Health and Social care partnership. It will offer help with carers rights and what local support is available. November 19th is carers rights day. This year's theme asks, "someone you know is a carer, but do they know it yet?." Many people that provide care may not see themselves as a carer so don't therefore access the information, support, and services that could really help them. If you know a carer – encourage them to come along and find out what support is available. This may include social care support, benefits and financial support or health information. No booking is required, just pop-in.

Little Children's Market, Ladywell





Salvation army Christmas Fayre, Howden



Crofthead care home fundraiser, Fauldhouse



Volunteering



Community woods and garden; Polbeth and West Calder

There is the opportunity to volunteer with Taylor Wimpy East Scotland at the Community woods and garden in Polbeth and West Calder. A successful volunteering session was held recently which coincided with the Development at Limefield Grove, (Taylor Wimpy East Scotland). Volunteers completed a range of tasks, such as helping clear and prepare planting areas and assisted with general maintenance and tidying. The housebuilder is committed to supporting communities where it builds. To get involved with the community woods and garden visit www.communitywoodsandgarden.co.uk/volunteer-with-us

Bathgate Stroke peer support group



Whitburn Community centre





Useful contacts

Advice shop	01506 283000 ww.westlothian.gov.uk
Bathgate stroke peer support group	07557816092 federicadistefano@chss.org.uk
British Gas energy	0330 808 3880 www.britishgasenergytrust.org.uk
Carers of West Lothian	01506 448000 www.cowl.org.uk
Citizens Advice Bureau	01506 432 977 www.cabwestlothian.org.uk
Community woods and garden Polbeth & West Calder	www.communitywoodsandgarden.co.uk
Craigsfarm community hub	01506 894 639 www.craigsfarm.org.uk
Crofthead care home	01501 770402 www.carehome.co.uk
West Lothian Council	01506 280000 www.westlothian.gov.uk
DASAT West Lothian	01506 281055 DASAT@westlothian.gov.uk
West Lothian Food Network	07712 521850 www.westlothianfoodnetwork.org
Home energy Scotland	0808 808 2282 www.homeenergyscotland.org
Rape crisis centre Glasgow	08088 000014 www.glasgowclyderapecrisis.org.uk
Ratho Christmas canal cruises	07749034468 SGTsantacruises@outlook.com
Salvation army Howden Liv.	01501 770 402 www.salvationarmy.org.uk
Samaritans	116 123 www.samaritans.org
Schoolbank west Lothian	www.schoolbank-westlothian.org
Spark charity	01506 442093 PAULINE@SPARKSCOT.COM
Sporting memories club Livingston	07340 560 306 www.sportingmemories.uk
The little children's market	www.thelittlechildrensmarket.com
Whitburn community centre	01506 280340 INFO@WHITBURNCDT.ORG.UK

WLDAS	01506 430 225 www.wldas.com
Westspace West Lothian	www.westspace.org.uk
Voluntary Sector Gateway	01506 650 111 www.voluntarysectorgateway.org