Engaging People
Finding Solutions

Blackwood Foundation Vision
To be the leading hub for engaging people and driving innovation in independent living
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## Blackwood Foundation Mission

To enhance the everyday lives of disabled people of all ages
Managers and partners

The Blackwood Foundation was established as a sister organisation to Blackwood in 2010, and this is the first Annual Report for the foundation. Instead of writing a traditional foreword, we decided to interview Bill Grant, chair of Blackwood Foundation and vice chair of the parent organisation of Blackwood, and Stephen Gallagher, chair of Blackwood, to let them tell about the need, vision and challenges for Blackwood Foundation.

David, Director until 2013, was the first staff member of the Blackwood Foundation. He joined in June 2009 and was charged with turning the board’s vision for the Blackwood Foundation into a reality.

So, David, was it daunting to create a new organisation from scratch?

In some ways yes, but that’s what I do. I’m at my best when I have a challenge and there isn’t an obvious or tried and tested solution. The process with the Foundation was fascinating. The Board had a clear idea about the impact they wanted to have, but at the same time they wanted to create something different and not duplicate the work of other organisations.

Even so, creating the Foundation solo must have been difficult?

I might have been the only Blackwood Foundation staff member but I was part of the Blackwood family. The support and expertise from colleagues across the organisation was incredible. Bear in mind Blackwood works throughout Scotland and has specialist staff in housing, care, asset management and corporate services. I couldn’t have asked for greater backup.

Does that mean you’re proud of what has been achieved?

Incredibly so! We still have challenges and the financial climate hasn’t improved much – but our progress has been outstanding. We have a world class social media site, a growing staff team and a raft of projects in the pipeline. This review highlights the progress we have made. We’ve delivered projects, won awards, hit targets, but the bottom line is that the work we have done is making a difference to people lives – and that’s why we started this in the first place.
Why did you create the Blackwood Foundation?

Stephen - We could see the exceptional services that Blackwood delivered to people, but we could also see that there were gaps, things that Blackwood wasn’t set up to do. Quite simply we wanted to fill those gaps.

Bill – That’s exactly right. We knew people were facing increasing pressures, so are we as an organisation that supports people to maximise their independence and life choices. We knew we needed to invest in finding solution to these challenges.

So the Blackwood Foundation is a research and development arm?

Bill – Kind of, buts it’s much more than that. The Foundation gives us a chance to step back, look at the bigger picture and the challenges we are going to be facing in the future, and then create ways to meet those challenges.

That's quite a bold move to create a charity like this in the middle of the biggest recession since the 1930's?

Bill – You could say that, but history tells us that in times of recession the smart organisations will invest in research and in their staff.

Stephen – Yes, and it’s fair to say the Board took quite a risk creating the Foundation, but the results that have been achieved more than validate this decision.

So you're satisfied with progress?

Bill – More than satisfied, we’re delighted with the progress that has been made in such a difficult financial climate. The team has created something that is making a real difference to people’s lives, and that’s what it comes down to, people.

So where next?

Bill – Well, bespoken has been the biggest and most high profile project that we have delivered to date, but the team have a range of other projects under development. These will make a difference to employment, digital inclusion, accessible design and many other issues. All our projects are inspired by the people we work with, and that's the key, keeping people at the heart of our activities.

“smart organisations will invest in research and in their staff”
Workshop Stories

We held a series of workshops talking to older and disabled people about design and technology.

We went from Orkney to the Borders and everywhere in-between holding 11 workshops with over 100 people.

Lydia Popowich, Caithness.
(Inverness Workshop)

At age nine Linda Popowich had a brain haemorrhage, and complicated surgery left her legs paralysed.

As a wheelchair user she had her own adapted home built from scratch in 2006, and she went to our workshop in Inverness because she feels very strongly about housing matters, problems and solutions:

“I felt that I had a lot to contribute with. This is something that very much matters to me, and it is an area where much improvement is needed,” says Lydia Popowich.

Liz Macleod, 66, Isle of Skye
(Portree Workshop)

Six and a half years ago Liz Macleod suffered from a prolapsed disc, which left her in a wheelchair. She managed to fight her way out of it, but worries about her independence in the future:

“I am not severely disabled for the moment. But my condition might get worse, and I might need more help. So it was very nice to see that there is someone out there who really listens and helps when you need it,” says Liz Macleod.

(At our workshop in Portree Liz and the others were asked to share their favourite piece of adapted technology – for her it was a gadget that helps her get her tights on: “It is just a small thing, but it really means a lot to me to be able to put them on myself.”)

Key Messages & Challenges

People are the experts - they come up with innovations all the time
As visually impaired David Ross was very interested in hearing the experiences and opinions of people with other and similar disabilities. But he also wanted to share his own:

“For my most useful piece of technology I remember mentioning my talking microwave. It is simply quite brilliant,” says David Ross, and continues:

“It was a good experience, well rounded and great to hear from so many different people,” says David Ross.

(The outcome of the workshops was the creation of our bespoken network, and David Ross has found great use in the site:

“I use bespoken quite often, and get a lot of good advise from there. I have also told my colleagues at Fife Sensory Impairment Centre all about the site.”}
Rumour had it that a Blackwood tenant in Portobello, Edinburgh, was unsatisfied with the accessibility of her local high street shops. She simply could not get into several of the shops with her power chair.

When Blackwood Foundation heard of Jennifer Evans’ struggles, we decided to take immediate action, and sent two of our Project Scotland volunteers, Laura Sandilands and Margie Fletcher, to meet with Jennifer in Portobello.

Jennifer Evans showed the volunteers around Portobello Road, and her attempts to get into several businesses were filmed. The idea of this was to post the film on bespoken to engage other members to share their experience with accessibility.

One of the places Jennifer Evans has tried to get into is the local pharmacist. They have installed a button to help wheelchair users access the building.

“People are speaking from experience and that is far more valuable than any University or college degree.” (Finding the answers by yourself; problem solving for the benefit of others - It is a great way to share knowledge.” Anonymous.

“My interest in bespoken is to see it develop as an engine for good – a place where disabled people can get together, share ideas, help each other – and, just perhaps, make positive changes to our world.” George, County Durham

“Well if that hasn’t given me a Monday morning kick up the bum nothing will!! Thanks Marion I really enjoyed reading about your life and will take inspiration from your spirit” Lynn
users opening the door. However, this button has been placed in a position, where Jennifer is unable of reaching it.

“It is really difficult trying to explain to people, what is wrong. They won’t usually believe you, until they have seen it. Having Blackwood Foundation to back me up is very nice. No one seemed interested in my problems until Laura and Margie showed up.” says Jennifer Evans.

The whole idea of our bespoken community sharing their accessibility experience then turned into “The Good, The Bad and the Unaccessible” campaign taking road shows to Blackwood properties all over the country.

“This place could be very good for me,” Jennifer Evans concludes.

‘Great for keeping up to date with disabled design, thoughts and issues.’ Anonymous.


“Great additional resource when looking for practical solutions” (to many issues our patient’s have.’). OT West Midlands

“Thank you so much for your help and support. This is really appreciated.” Alex, Milton Keynes

“Great to see the work you are doing. It took me 7 years to get everything in place to support me and my needs still change, so always need new information.” Fiona, Scottish Borders

“I use bespoken all the time, and I quite often share ideas from the forums with my son, who makes prosthetic legs for the armed forces for a living.” Eva, Glenrothes, Fife.
At Blackwood Foundation it’s not all about taking and sharing ideas: we act. We aspire to be the link between disabled people and designers, product developers, architects and engineers. This has led to several projects where we work with partners outside the organisation: two of these are Brunel University near London, and Edinburgh Capital Hotel. With more to come.

Another part of Blackwood Foundation’s vision is to get disabled people involved and integrated in the design process of adapted technology. One of the ways we do this is by building up partnerships with external partners such as Brunel University in London. Here Dr. Busayawan Lam teaches the product design students about the core skill of listening:

“I love the idea of people designing for themselves. There is no point in designing, if there is no need. And there is no point designing something, that won’t work properly for the target group. Our students need to learn to listen really carefully to focus groups. On bespoken our students can interact directly with people with disabilities, and they can co-design solutions based on the great suggestions on the site,” says Dr. Busayawan Lam and concludes:

“This partnership is very important to us.”

In the near future both Dr. Busayawan Lam and Blackwood Foundation hope to involve a product developer in the process to help get some great designs onto the commercial market.

Blackwood Foundation have also partnered up with specific students at Brunel University, creating final year projects together. For product design student Dimitrios Stamatis this meant designing an environment sensor system, that subtly helps detect when elderly and disabled people start showing signs of a need for more care.

“When you design a product for a specific group, it is essential to talk to people. bespoken provides a great opportunity to share information and make better designs,” says Dimitrios Stamatis, who in hindsight wishes that he had used the site even more.

Another student, Chinese Joyce Jin, is just graduating with her co-designed project, a very special spoon, and Blackwood Foundation is looking forward to working with more Brunel students in the future.
Edinburgh Capital Hotel

Five miles from Edinburgh Airport and three miles from the city centre lies Edinburgh Capital Hotel, which has become one of Blackwood Foundation’s external partners.

As a part of this partnership, Edinburgh Capital Hotel took a visit from two of Blackwood’s tenants in March 2013. Lizanne Burton, who is a wheelchair user, and Ronnie Wilkes, who is visually impaired, teamed up with us to check the actual accessibility of the hotel’s accessible rooms.

“I really believe in good customers’ service. And good service is even more important when you are travelling as a disabled person,” says Ronnie Wilkes who is quite used to working with visual impairment awareness.

From the visit came a long list of suggestions for improvements. For instance, Ronnie suggested that the hotel would meet visually impaired guests upon arrival to give a guided tour of the room. This helps making the stay comfortable and the guest confident in moving around the room. He also suggested that the television’s audio description feature should be turned on before a visually impaired person arrives. Otherwise it can be very hard to find. Lizanne Burton for instance suggested that the hotel would create enough space at the side of the bed to close the curtains from a wheelchair, and that the showerhead should be lowered upon arrival of a wheelchair using guest. Both of them agreed that a check list with offered equipment would be a big help prior to arriving.

The report ended up including 32 specific suggestions, and the hotel immediately made some of the changes:

“We instantly removed some glass containers from the bathrooms, and we made a checklist for future guests, so all needed equipment and adaptations are in the room at arrival. We now also guide visually impaired guests around the room when they arrive,” says Front of House Manager, Adele Macindoe, who showed the delegation around the hotel.

Unfortunately it has not yet been possible to make some of the bigger changes like making the bathroom doors open both inwards and outwards. The hotel has recently done extensive renovation and upgrading, and the bigger things on Lizanne and Ronnie’s list will be taken into consideration, when the place is refurbished the next time. (A big lesson learned therefore is: Ask before you refurbish or build. Great improvements can come out of it. And Blackwood Foundation is happy to help.)
In June 2012 Blair Anderson was to undertake one week of work experience at Blackwood Foundation. This was a mandatory part of his fifth year at high school. He was to do little tasks on bespoken, while learning important lessons of working in an office environment. However it turned into somewhat of a different experience for Blair on the last day of his week with Blackwood Foundation:

“I had come in to have a normal day, and it started out like that. I handed over the stuff I had been working on in the week. But then there was a lot of fuss: There was a big award show that afternoon, where Blackwood Foundation was nominated for one of the awards, and suddenly invited people we unable to go along. I was asked if I wanted to come, and then jumped straight into a car,” says Blair Anderson.

At the award show Blair and the rest of the Blackwood Foundation delegation were met with a table, food and what not. The young man was very impressed. Then the ceremony began and Blackwood Foundation won the Care Accolades Innovation and Redesign Award:

“No one thought we would win, and it was pretty incredible when our name was called and we all went up on the stage. The best thing was to see just how happy everyone was. We had fought off so much amazing competition,” tells Blair Anderson.

“It was such an amazing and unexpected end to a really great week at Blackwood Foundation,” says Blair Anderson, who is now graduating high school and moving on to university after the summer break.
Bringing the tenants to the table

2012 was a great year for Blackwood Foundation, and in October we found ourselves nominated for the 2012 The Herald Scotland Digital Business Awards: The second nomination in just one year.

For this big occasion we decided to bring some of the Blackwood tenants along to the ceremony in Glasgow on the 11th of October 2012.

One of them was 33-year-old Scott Robb, who lives in St Leonard’s Court in Ayr and spends a great deal of time playing powerchair football and disabled tennis.

“It was very special for me. I have never been to anything like this before,” says Scott Robb.

He and the rest of the Blackwood Foundation delegation had suited up for the occasion, and rightfully so, as they had to go on stage claiming the Public Sector Award for our work with www.bespoken.me.

“The meal was lovely and Blackwood Foundation won – it doesn’t get better than that,” concludes Scott Robb.

Herald Digital Business Awards 2012

Recognition from the digital business sector of our innovative use of social media and digital communications to create a life changing online community.
Engaging people – finding solutions

The whole point of Blackwood Foundation is to engage people in the design and product design processes. One of the ways we have put our vision into action is by bringing some of our members to Britain’s largest independent living exhibition, Naidex, in 2012. Here we let our members find the products they were most interested in. We also asked them to make short videos about the products to share on bespoken.

Naidex proved life changing

Six years ago, Anne Walker got diagnosed with a complex degenerative condition related to MS, she became a wheelchair user, and a move to adapted housing became necessary. Two years ago, Anne and her husband Jim Walker moved into Blackwood housing in Hurlford from their former home Glasgow. Soon after moving in, the couple was invited to Naidex with Blackwood Foundation.

“We hadn’t been to anything like this ever before, and when we were invited, we instantly found it a great opportunity for us to engage more with the Foundation and experience the latest developments in technologies,” says Jim Walker.

At Naidex, Jim remembers, they were asked to spend three days looking for products that could help them out in their day to day life, and record their findings on video.

Back when the couple went to Naidex with Blackwood, they had just bought a new car, which still needed to be adapted. Therefore Jim and Anne Walker primarily spent the days looking at hoists for Anne’s scooter. They found one that suited their needs just perfectly:

“We ended up buying the hoist at Naidex, and it has proven to be 100 percent life changing. It means that my wife can go places without me. It gives her the independence she hadn’t had for years,” says Jim Walker, who is the full time carer for his wife.
The video Jim and Anne captured about the hoist at Naidex was later showed at a presentation of the year’s experience by David Jarrold.

The couple probably won’t go back to Birmingham, Jim tells, but he has found a smaller but similar exhibition in Glasgow, Naidex Scotland, which they are both looking forward to attend.

“If it wasn’t for Blackwood, we would be in a completely different situation, so we were very happy to give a little bit back,” says Jim Walker.
Avoiding a plunge

Margaret McEleny also joined Blackwood Foundation’s expedition to Birmingham in 2012. She has lived in Blackwood housing since 1993, which makes 2013 the year of her 20th anniversary with the Housing Association.

Margaret is paralysed from the chest down, and as a consequence of that a wheelchair user. Her great passion is disabled swimming, and she is one of Scotland’s most successful female swimmers of recent times having a medal haul to her name of three gold, five silver and seven bronze from four Paralympic Games from 1992 to 2004.

But lately she has had a tracheotomy, which means that she is no longer able to swim. However, not even the risk of drowning can keep her away from the pool side: Four times a week she coaches children and adults with disabilities in her favourite sport, and last year she was given the honour of being one of the 580 torchbearers of the 2012 London Paralympics Relay for her contributions to the sport.

Margaret McEleny was specially selected to go to Naidex after having written a statement about why she wanted to go:

“I have always loved this kind of event. I am very interested in seeing the latest developments and inventions, to see what’s available,” says Margaret McEleny.

She and her carer got the camera and went around to try out things they were interested in and interviewed people.

“I was especially interested in a hoist which made it a lot easier to get into a swimming pool,” Margaret says. This was her favourite product of the entire exhibition, though there might have been some hidden gems:

“There was just too much to see. I wish, I had had two more days to see it all,” she says.

Margaret is planning on going back to Naidex next year. This time on her own.
A boost of confidence

Public transport had long been a no-go for Christine Summers. She has been a wheelchair user since an accident left her leg crushed, and since then she had not used any public transportation. It simply involved too many worries and risks. That is until she went to Naidex in Birmingham with Blackwood Foundation.

“I was a bit scared at times: How were they going to get me off the train in time? But in the end it was fine, and I would go by train again,” says Christine Summers. For her Naidex was about more than technology:

“Going to Naidex was a major confidence boost for me. I gained back some of the confidence that I had lost with my accident,” says the 69-year-old Blackwood tenant, who lives Argyll with her husband and two dogs.

While at Naidex Christine Summers got her eye on an Otto Bock light weight wheelchair:

“It was light, compact, comfortable and moved with ease. I ended up buying that chair.”

“...I would like to thank everyone at Blackwood Foundation. Going to Naidex was an absolute ball. But it was also exhausting: There was simply too much I wanted to see and try, but if anyone asked me to go back, I would be there like a shark,” concludes Christine Summers.

Britain's largest independent living exhibition, Naidex, has become an annual event for Blackwood Foundation. In 2011 we went to Birmingham to test out the idea of bespoke, and in 2012 we launched the site and brought some of our first members along to engage with the exhibition. In 2013 four Project Scotland volunteers were taken along to capture the exhibition in over 100 short video presentations for those who weren't able to come along.
He had graduated with a degree in international politics from University of Stirling, when realised that his job in Tesco didn't really get him in the career direction he wanted. So Steven Baird quit his job. And while searching for a graduate position, he chose to volunteer through Project Scotland – becoming the first volunteer at Blackwood Foundation in May 2011.

“I came to Blackwood Foundation when bespoken was still an idea, and within the five months I was there, we had launched the site. I am very proud to have been a part of that process,” says Steven Baird. Specifically Steven worked with the design of the site as well as engaging with partners and the new users of bespoken.

“Volunteering for Blackwood Foundation gave me great experience in working in an office environment, and I gained an awful lot of experience working on projects and website launching,” says Steven. He adds that everyone at the office treated him as a “real” member of staff, and that he much appreciated this, as you never know what you get when you join an organisation as a volunteer. When volunteering through Project Scotland one still has to keep up with the demands to claim Jobseeker’s Allowance. This includes searching for paid positions, going to job interviews etc. So did Steven, and eventually he was called in for an interview with Lloyds Banking Group.

“The interview committee at Lloyds were very impressed with my work at Blackwood Foundation. Just the fact that I was actively trying to improve my experience was useful. Then came what I had actually achieved,” says Steven Baird. He got the job, and is currently working as a static data analyst in the commercial banking department, and is still grateful to Blackwood Foundation:

“Blackwood Foundation certainly did wonders for me. Without this experience I wouldn’t be where I am today.”
A stream of volunteers

Since Steven Baird left Blackwood Foundation has had 11 volunteers – 10 through Project Scotland, all carrying out different tasks suited to their skills and aspirations. Some have come along to Naidex to promote bespoke and report the exhibition. Some have written articles. One has boosted our CRM system. And one has even written big parts of this report.

“Initially I decided to start volunteering at the Blackwood Foundation hoping to find something to do with my time while between jobs, but I found a whole lot more. I found a supportive community of like-minded people looking to make a difference to people’s lives. I was able to use my skills and attributes to help the team conquer some amazing feats – such as videoing most of the 2013 Naidex exhibition in Birmingham - but the best part is that I was able to learn from my fellow volunteers and bespoke members alike. The whole experience of volunteering with Blackwood has been such a positive influence in my life and one that I will never forget.”

“We would like to use this opportunity to thank all our previous and present volunteers:
Vicky Karakosta, Alex Hills, Laura Sandilands, Margie Fletcher, Slaine O’Halloran, Tamara Stupalova, Zyhirin Tabaum, Rosie Ince, Steven Baird, Robert Shepherd, and Mette Nielsen.
Facts and Stats

- bespoke
- site visits over 24,000
- members 750
- finance
volunteering

volunteer hours
over 1,100

page views
over 90,000

income - £80,601
expenditure - £102,440
surplus / loss - (£21,839)
Projects for the future

**Product Development**
Bringing people together with designers, developers and researchers to drive improvements and innovation.

**Telecare**
Developing a new platform to support telecare services and developing new ways to deliver services using telecare.

**Digital Inclusion**
Helping people get online, stay online and make the most of opportunities online.

**Employability**
Looking at how we can support people with a disability to find and thrive in employment.

**Accessible Tourism**
Identifying and promoting excellence in the tourism and hospitality industry by utilising the expertise of disabled people.

**Design Guide**
Creating a guide that enables people to make their home accessible, functional and attractive.

**Design Awards**
Establishing an awards scheme that recognises excellence in design and innovation.
Welfare Advice

Supporting people to navigate the changes in the welfare and benefits system.