Agenda Item	10
Report No	EDU/35/26

The Highland Council

Committee: **Education**

Date: **18 November 2026**

Report Title: **Community Learning and Development (CLD) Plan 2024-2027 Annual Report: Year 2 Report – Academic Session 2025/2026**

Report By: **Assistant Chief Executive – People**

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The Highland Council has responsibility for statutory provision of Community Learning and Development in Highland. This report and **Appendix 2** provide Members with a summary of the progress made by the Highland CLD Partnership in year two of the Highland Community Learning and Development Plan 2024-2027.

Whilst Highland Council is responsible for statutory provision, this report aims to jointly reflect the work of third sector partners and voluntary organisations, providing a holistic picture of the good work in Highland.

The annual report is not an exhaustive list of CLD activity in Highland. 'Spotlight Case Studies' are provided under each heading in the covering report to illustrate the type of activities and approaches that are delivered and further examples are included in the Appendix to provide a flavour of the breadth and depth of the activity the CLD partnership delivers in Highland communities.

1.2 CLD Plan priorities:

1. **Mental Health and Wellbeing** – CLD Learners experience improved mental health and wellbeing.
2. **Voice, Inclusion and Participation** – CLD Learners increase their ability to influence change.
3. **Digital Inclusion** – CLD Learners experience increased inclusion in digital life.
4. **Employment, Volunteering and Training** – Supporting routes towards economic independence.
5. **Community Development & Resilience** – Increased community capacity building to support resilience in individuals and communities
6. **Aligning Partnership Practices** – Improve how we work together through our commitment to governance and workforce development.
7. **Climate and Social Justice** – Increased Climate Change knowledge and understanding of linked impact on vulnerable communities.

The key achievements for year 2 of the Plan under each of these themes is set out in paragraph 6.3. and in more detail at **Appendix 2**.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

i. Note the progress, including key achievements, made in year two of the Highland Community Learning and Development Plan;
ii. Note the requirement to plan effectively for the CLD plan 2027-30 as a key activity in year three of this plan, and;
iii. Note that a further follow up inspection re-visit from His Majesty Inspectors of Education for CLD has been advised to Highland Council for February 2027.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource
The requirements for the CLD Plan are delivered within the existing resources of the Community Planning Partnership.

3.2 Legal

The primary legal framework for Community Learning and Development (CLD) in Scotland is set out in The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013, which operate under Section 2 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. Under the legislation local authorities must publish a three-year CLD plan through their Community Planning Partnerships

Education authorities are guided by the Community Learning and Development: Guidance for 2024-2027 link published by the Scottish Government, alongside standards maintained by the CLD Standards Council.

More detailed information about the legislative and policy context for CLD is set out in section 5 below.

3.3 Risk
There are no new risk implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)

There are no new health and safety risks arising from the contents of this report.

3.5 Gaelic
The contribution of Gaelic to CLD activity is included in **Appendix 2** of the CLD Annual Report 2025-26 in the updates and case studies as follows:

- Gaelic CLD team - Update of 2025-26 activity that directly supports delivery of The Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan 2024–29, particularly in Strategic

Priority 1.1: Increasing support for Gaelic users and learners in their communities and networks (p52-53)

- Highland Youth Parliament Chairperson's opening and closing speeches at the HYP conference (p25)
- Gaelic language and participation in cultural activities in Dingwall 800 and over the last four decades of Fèis Rois (p66)
- Ceitidh Hutton's new book Grumpa agus na Nàbaidhean Ùra - the first Gaelic book to be included in World Book Day 2027 and Gaelic BookBug at Dingwall library (p66-67)
- Gaelic language and culture embedded throughout the day at the CLD Conference, Inverness Town House - Ceangail agus Meòraich Co-labhairt Ionnsachadh is Leasachadh Coimhearsnachd (p68)

4. Impacts

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies, or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 **Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary**

4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening was undertaken on 01/07/2026. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval, and a summary is included at **Appendix 1.**

4.3.2 The screening process has concluded that there are a number or items that are positively impacted due to the nature of CLD as a profession and its contribution to equalities though anti-discriminatory practices. The screening also indicated that no full impact assessment it required for this item. Members are asked to consider the summary in **Appendix 1** to support the decision making process.

4.3.3 **Impact Assessment Area**	**Conclusion of Screening**
Equality	• Children and Young People – *Positive* • Children affected by disability – *Positive* • Older adults – *Positive*
Socio-economic	*Positive*
Human Rights	*Positive*
Children's Rights and Well-being	*Positive*
Island and Mainland Rural	*no impact*

Climate Change	*Positive*
Data Rights	*no impact*

5. Overview

5.1 Legislation and Expectations

The Highland Council has a statutory duty, as set-out in The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013, to publish a Community Learning and Development (CLD) plan every three years describing how they will co-ordinate and secure "adequate and efficient" CLD provision with other sector partners. This report presents the progress made in year 2 of the 3-year plan (2024-2027).

5.2 CLD work in Scotland is guided by the Strategic Guidance for Community Planning Partnerships: Community Learning and Development 2012 document and underpinned in legislation through The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013; and supports the achievement of the following national policy goals:

- to ensure communities across Scotland – particularly those which are disadvantaged – have access to the CLD support they need;
- to strengthen coordination between the full range of CLD providers and respond appropriately to the expectations set by the CLD Strategic Guidance for Community Planning Partnerships: Community Learning and Development 2012 (Scottish Government);
- to reinforce the role of communities and learners in assessment, planning, and evaluation processes, enabling them to shape local CLD provision, and;
- to articulate the important role and contribution of CLD and make more visible.

5.3 The Context for CLD in 2024-2027 is guided by the Scottish Government Community Learning and Development Plans: Guidance for 2024-2027 which emphasises that plans should be developed and reported through Community Planning Partnerships.

Plans should acknowledge the existence of the Independent Review of Community Learning and Development in the preparation and content of their 2024-2027 CLD plan. This may include things such as:

- Carrying forward much of the content of their existing 2021-2024 plans and only reflecting significant changes which have impacted communities and learners;
- Considering the level of learner and partner consultation appropriate to the level of updates made to the plans at this time.

6. Community Learning and Development Plan (CLD) Annual Report 2025-2026

6.1 **Development of the Highland CLD Plan 2024-2027** the three-year plan was informed by a review, undertaken by the CLD Partnership, of the following:

- All available Community Partnership led locality plans.
- Adult Learner voice in Community Needs Analyses

- Youth voice in Youth Forums using the Place Standard tool.
- Highland Youth Parliament members' voice
- CLD Operational Group members consultation and data workshop
- CLD Partnership self-evaluation

The Highland CLD Plan does not seek to outline all proposed CLD activity to be undertaken in Highland. Working with partners, the CLD plan has identified priorities to focus collaboration.

The approved CLD Plan outlines 7 Priority themes. Following discussion through the CLD Managers Scotland group it was recognised in year 2 of the plan, there should be a focus on 3 priorities areas – Mental Health and Wellbeing; Voice, Inclusion and Participation; and Employment, Volunteering and Training. This advice stemmed from cross sector CLD delivery groups for Adult Learning and Youth Work identifying that these three of the seven themes in the current CLD plan should be the focus of this coming year, delivering on the plan in a more streamlined way, prioritising resources available.

This was not intended to be a major change of focus – wider work has continued where required and is evidenced for the other themes. It should be recognised that the work of CLD often intertwines throughout multiple themes, and that this advice regarding direction for year 2 results from recognising the current needs that are pressing for the people CLD teams are working with, addressing mental health issues, the impact of poverty / rurality on people's lives, discrimination, risk of digital harm, a sense of not having influence and agency in their own life.

<u>CLD Priority / CLD Outcomes</u>

1. **Mental Health and Wellbeing** – CLD Learners experience improved mental health and wellbeing.
2. **Voice, Inclusion and Participation** - CLD Learners increase their ability to influence change.
3. **Digital Inclusion** – CLD Learners experience increased inclusion in digital life.
4. **Employment, Volunteering and Training** - Supporting routes towards economic independence.
5. **Community Development & Resilience** - Increased community capacity building to support resilience in individuals and communities
6. **Aligning Partnership Practices** – Improve how we work together through our commitment to governance and workforce development.
7. **Climate and Social Justice** – Increased Climate Change knowledge and understanding of linked impact on vulnerable communities.

Appendix 2 provides a summary and examples of evidence of the progress made against the priorities in Year 2 of the CLD Plan 2024-2027.

6.2 **How the Plan is delivered**

The ambitions set out in The Plan are delivered through the 9 Community Partnership CLD delivery partners. The Highland CLD governance structures

provide an opportunity for partners to come together to plan, deliver and evaluate CLD provision using the strategic priorities as a framework.

6.3 **Key CLD Partnership Achievements in Year 2 of the CLD Plan 2024-2027**

CLD Priority 1: Mental Health & Wellbeing

Headline Data

- **HTSI Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund:** 47 projects awarded £851,520 in Year 5 (2025-26), over 5 years of fund – 331 grants awarded, exceeding £3.9m investment.
- **Children & Young People's MHWB Fund:** £397,222 invested across 46 community projects, supporting 9,012 children/young people, engaging 2,936 family members/carers, and receiving 3,000+ self-referrals.
- **Highland Council Attendance Project:** UKSP funded, initially employed 6 Youth Support Officers across 3 secondary schools for S2 pupils with 40%–70% attendance, and used to fund partnership pilot projects. All activities designed to test youth work approaches to help young people re-engage with school.

Spotlight Case Study

- **Flip of the Coin (The Flipside, Alness):** Operates projects like *Art of Wellbeing*, *Growing Connections*, and *Roots to Recovery* using creative spaces and food to build social connection. Supported 265 people over the year (70% via statutory referrals). Loneliness reported by 82% on arrival, moved to 93% feeling more optimistic about the future after 6 weeks.

Wider Impact

- Reduces social isolation and prevents escalation to specialist statutory services by delivering early, trauma-informed, community-based support.
- Fosters a sense of purpose and belonging for vulnerable groups, including refugees, neurodivergent youth, and families facing socioeconomic disadvantage.

CLD Priority 2: Voice, Inclusion & Participation

Headline Data

- **Adult Learner Forums:** 48 attendees across 3 regional forums (North, West, Central) and 13 active Learner Leader volunteers.
- **Youth Participation:** 88 Participatory Action Trackers (PATs) submitted and triaged.
- **Highland Youth Parliament (HYP) Conference 2026:** Attended by 225 participants (120 young people, 15 young leaders, 35 staff, 55 partners/Councillors) launching the "Our Voices, Our Future, Our Highland" Manifesto 2026–2031.

- **Youth Work Outcomes Framework Pilot:** 79 young people participated across 29 Associated School Groups; 100% showed improvement in communication, and significant gains in confidence (59/66).
- **Growing2gether:** 16-week nursery mentoring programme resulting in a 14% improvement in wellbeing and an 18% reduction in anxiety/depression symptoms.

Spotlight Case Study

- **Tamara (Learning Leader):** A Ukrainian refugee living in Aviemore who went from feeling "like an alien" with minimal English to actively contributing as a Learning Leader. Engaging in ESOL and numeracy classes helped her build social connections, feel supported, and gain confidence to influence local community decisions.

Wider Impact

- Empowers learners and young people to influence local services, policy, and decision-making (e.g., reinstating cancelled bus routes, shaping online safety policies, and contributing to the UK City of Culture 2029 bid).
- Strengthens intergenerational relationships and builds personal resilience and agency through structured participation models like the Lundy Model. https://www.childrensrightshighland.co.uk/

CLD Priority 3: Digital Inclusion

Headline Data

- **Online Safety & Tech Survey (Highland Youth Convener):** Engaged 255 young people across 11 schools, collecting over 4,000 comments and 3,240 survey statement responses.
- **Adult Learning Digital Inclusion:** 39 learners engaged in digital skills, 16 used the digital learning platform, 12 received free digital devices, and 26 received Universal Credit platform support.
- **Connecting Communities (Lairg & District Learning Centre):** £18,000 grant to assist up to 200 individuals with practical digital skills.
- **Council Digital Champions:** 319 badges collected across internal departments to build digital capacity.

Spotlight Case Study

- **Online Safety and Technology Focus (Leah McBain, Youth Convener):** A youth-led research project examining young people's relationships with technology (privacy, AI, cyberbullying, access). Rather than banning tech, it positions young people as active agents to co-create policies balancing digital usage with responsibility and support.

Wider Impact

- Bridges the digital divide by addressing device/data poverty, enabling vulnerable individuals to perform essential tasks like online banking, benefit claims, and healthcare access.

- Builds digital confidence, cyber safety, and critical digital literacy for both community members and local public sector workers.

CLD Priority 4: Employability, Volunteering & Training

Headline Data

- **Adult Learning Achievements:** Delivered 33,114 learning hours across 44 nationalities; 87% achieved 1+ learning goals, and 90% reported improved confidence.
- **Youth Awards & Achievements:** 748 total awards/qualifications achieved (including 111 Dynamic Youth, 33 Hi5, 324 Saltire, and 137 Resilience for Life Awards).
- **High Life Highland Leadership Programme:** 847 young people registered in 2025–26, contributing over 56,775 volunteer leadership hours.
- **Inverness Foodstuff:** Served 15,572 three-course meals powered by 80+ volunteers contributing 11,674 volunteer hours.
- **Estimated Highland Volunteering:** 20,282 volunteers across the region.

Spotlight Case Study

- **New Start Highland Training & Reuse Village:** Supports 1,500 people and families annually, combining volunteering, training, and reuse services to reduce poverty and inequality. Working through the Highland Employability Partnership (HEP) with No One Left Behind (NOLB) and the All in Highlands employability partnership model, the organisation has helped over 800 people into employment in the last year, supporting those facing barriers to work.

Wider Impact

- Moves individuals away from isolation toward economic independence by building pathways through partnership working to increase work-readiness skills, formal qualifications, and volunteering.
- Strengthens the local social enterprise economy and delivers essential social safety nets (food security, clothing, furniture reuse, and debt advice).

CLD Priority 5: Community Development & Resilience

Headline Data

- **Engage Highland & Participation:** 12,488 visitors on the online platform; supported 57 community engagement events and 11 Area Place Plans.
- **Community Ownership:** 60+ Community Asset Transfers approved since 2017 (9 new requests in 2025–26); £217,000 in community benefit value provided.
- **ESOL Resettlement (ARAP):** 25 Afghan learners engaged, achieving 10 SQA ESOL awards, with 7 progressing to UHI Inverness College.
- **Tain YMCA Summer Programme:** Distributed 2,562 free lunches and logged 3,613 total family/youth contacts over 6 weeks.

- **HTSI Network Reach:** Supported an average of 380 organisations per quarter with 4,742 1-to-1 support interactions.
- **Poverty and Equality Commission Report** – Action on Third Sector strategy, maximise incomes/address fuel poverty, develop the Hub approach, embed Lived Experience into service design.

Spotlight Case Study

- **GRO For You Community Innovation Campus (Tain):** The £1.8 million community hub brings together training, employment, and family support, and has created 27 local jobs and helped 982 learners gain qualifications or personal development opportunities in 2025. Through its Gro Futures and Gro Communities programmes, it supports skills development, employability, wellbeing, volunteering, and community connection, with a focus on reducing the Highland skills gap and strengthening local communities.

Wider Impact

- Enhances rural community capacity and self-reliance by enabling local groups to own physical assets, run local projects, and secure independent funding.
- Promotes cultural integration, reduces poverty, and tackles rural isolation by offering inclusive community spaces, intergenerational initiatives, and family support.

CLD Priority 6: Aligning Partnership Practices

Headline Data

- **Connect & Reflect CLD Conference 2026:** Attended by 91 delegates from 8 regions across the North of Scotland (44% third sector participation, 21 showcase projects) and Professional Learning Offers Reflective Practice (19) and Effective CLD Partnerships (24)
- **In-House Workforce Qualifications:** 3 SCQF Level 6 qualifications endorsed by CLD Standards Council. Completed 43 full awards and 10 modules (98 total units) between Feb 2024 and Sept 2026.
- **Regional Youth Work Training Day:** 88 practitioners and volunteers attended joint Highland & Moray training with public and third sector, supported by YouthLink Scotland and CLD Standards Council.

Spotlight Case Study

- **Learn North Professional Learning Alliance:** CLD Practitioners in the North of Scotland and the islands bringing together public and third-sector practitioners for the first time in 15 years in Inverness. Their flagship Connect & Reflect Conference embedded Gaelic culture and language. Professional learning offers include Reflective Practice and Effective CLD Partnerships to improve shared decision-making frameworks, upskill the workforce and break down professional isolation in remote areas.

Wider Impact

- "Grow our own" CLD qualified workforce and volunteers locally, overcoming recruitment shortages in rural Adult Learning and Youth Work.
- Drives consistency, quality assurance, and collaborative practice across Third Sector and statutory agencies throughout Highland and surrounding local authorities.

CLD Priority 7: Climate & Social Justice

Headline Data

- **Countryside Rangers:** 12,746 CLD engagements in 2025–26 (a 57.18% increase year-on-year); 96% of customers reported their life improved as a result.
- **Green Libraries / Climate Champions:** £32,000 SLIC funding awarded across 10 Highland libraries.
- **Adult Learning Climate Activities:** Delivered 43 climate awareness sessions.
- **Highland Youth Parliament Ask:** Presented 4 core climate priorities to the Highland Council Climate Change Committee, which were officially accepted into Council policy in March 2026.

Spotlight Case Study

- **HYP Climate Change Committee Presentation:** Representatives from the Youth Parliament formally presented to the Council's Climate Change Committee, outlining 4 actionable demands: mandatory secondary climate education, improved cycling/walking routes, local green community actions, and better in-school recycling infrastructure.

Wider Impact

- Connects environmental sustainability directly with social justice, helping disadvantaged groups adapt to climate change while gaining health, wellbeing, and financial benefits through repair, reuse, and growing projects.
- Empowers young people to lead climate action and directly embed youth perspectives into regional government climate resilience plans.

7. HMIE Progress Visit – update

7.1 HMIE visited the Highland Council in **February 2026** to undertake a further inspection of Community Learning and Development (CLD), following the submission of a progress report in July 2025 for the 12-month period from the original HMIE Progress Visit (PV) in July 2024.

During the visit, HMIE inspectors talked to learners and community representatives, CLD leaders, managers, staff, volunteers, and other key stakeholders. HMIE Inspectors evaluated the progress made by Highland Council and their partners on the areas of improvement identified in the previous progress visit.

It should be noted, since the original visit, adult learning and youth work staff previously located in Highlife Highland have returned to Highland Council.

The HMIE Inspection report considered areas for further action:

- **Action 1: Relationships between a few youth work providers should be developed and improved to address current issues and support the planned Youth Work Providers Network.**

  The 2026 report noted the Highland Council had made good progress on this improvement action. The Youth Work Delivery Group (YWDG) is now established and meeting regularly. This was recognised as a 'green shoot' of progress with further development required 'to deepen relationships and strengthen joint working.' Examples supporting this action included improved working relationships with schools – for example, through the attendance project, delivering a cross-sector Youth Work Conference with partners, and working in rural localities with partners to support youth work delivery.

- **Action 2: Joint self-evaluation across CLD partners should be further developed to include opportunities to involve partner agencies in the development of the new CLD Plan.**

  The 2026 report acknowledged progress had been made but further work was required to fully address this aspect for improvement. Areas for further development included the reporting of CLD and the use of shared self-evaluation to enhance the monitoring, reporting and governance of CLD across Highland to the Partnership.

HMIE will return for a further progress visit in February 2027 to review progress on two actions. Action undertaken and next steps:

Action 1

- The CLD Youth Work Delivery Group is now well established and has continues to meet regularly – developing and strengthening relationships.

Action 2

- The structure and governance of the CLD Strategic Group has been reviewed, and work has started to expand the group to ensure it is fully representative of relevant stakeholders to become the Highland CLD Strategic 'Partnership' Group. This widening of group membership aims to support improvement of joint self-evaluation, collective development of future plans, and joint monitoring and reporting.
- Early participation and engagement will commence with learners, communities, CLD practitioners and partners to embed Lived Experience in the co-production of the new CLD Plan 2027-30 to be published before September 2027.

8. Next Steps

8.1

- In respect of Action 2 noted in 7.1, the CLD Strategic Group membership has been reviewed, and an expanded list of representatives agreed with

current membership to ensure the group becomes a more representative strategic partnership. Invitations to join the group have been issued to new members and once they are in place, a meeting will be held and further meeting schedule agreed.

- The CLD Strategic Group will support operational delivery partners in addressing the outstanding issues in the 2026 HMIE progress visit report to ensure continuous improvement for the CLD Partnership.
- The CLD Strategic Group will provide direction for the operational delivery partners to implement CLD governance throughout the period of the 2024-2027 CLD Plan.
- The CLD Strategic Group will continue to build a strong CLD Partnership to support the delivery of CLD actions for Year 3 of the Highland CLD plan including the development of the next 3-year CLD Plan 2027-30 due for publication in September 2027.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 6 November 2026

Authors:

Mark Richardson, Principal Adult and Youth Services Manager
Helena MacLeod, CLD Support Officer
Roisin Irvine, Adult Learning Manager
John Taylor, Youth Work Manager
Anna Templeton, Pathways and Lifelong Learning Manager

Background Papers:

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment Screening
Appendix 2 - CLD Annual Report 2025-2026

Integrated Impact Assessment Screening

About proposal

What does this proposal relate to? Action or delivery plan

Proposal name: Highland Community Learning and Development Plan 24-27

High level summary of the proposal: Annual update on the plan for 2025 to 2026

Who may be affected by the proposal? All Highland residents with specific focus on young people and adult learners.

Start date of proposal: 01/07/2025

End date of proposal: 30/06/2026

Does this proposal result in a change or impact to one or more Council service? No

Does this relate to an existing proposal? Yes

Provide details of the existing proposal: Highland Community Learning and Development Plan 2024-2027.

Author details

Name: mark richardson

Job title: Principal Adult and Youth

Email address: mark.richardson@highland.gov.uk

Service: People

Responsible officer details

Name: Anna Templeton

Job title: Pathways and Lifelong Learning Manager

Email address: Anna.Templeton@highland.gov.uk

Sign off date: 2026-07-30

Equalities, poverty, and human rights

Protected characteristics

Select what impact the proposal will have on the following protected characteristics:

Sex: Positive

Age: Positive

Disability: Positive

Religion or belief: No impact

Race: Positive

Sexual orientation: No impact

Gender reassignment: No impact

Pregnancy and maternity: No impact

Marriage and civil partnership: No impact

Protected characteristics impact details: CLD takes an actively anti-discriminatory approach - targeting vulnerable groups oftern relating to protected characteristics.

Poverty and socio-economic

What impact is the proposal likely to have on the following?

Prospects and opportunities: Positive

Places: Positive

Financial: Positive

Poverty and socio-economic impact details: CLD programmes increase employability and also support increased financial literacy

Human rights

Which of the below human rights will be affected by this proposal? No human rights will be affected

What impact do you consider this proposal to have on the human rights of people? Positive

Human rights impact details: CLD takes a rights based approach - postively impacting on the right to education.

Equalities, poverty and human rights screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to equalities, poverty and human rights? Positive impact

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Children's rights and wellbeing

What likely impact will the proposal have on children and young people? Positve both direct and indirect

Which of the below children's rights will be affected by the proposal? You are working in the best interests of the child (Article 3), Children have a right to education (Article 28)

Explain how the children's rights selected above will be affected: All those selected are positvely impacted thrpough the work this delivery plan update represents

Children's rights and wellbeing screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to children's rights and wellbeing? Positive impact

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Data protection

Will your proposal involve processing personal data? No

Data protection screening assessment

What change will there be to the way personal data is processed? No personal data will be processed

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Island and mainland rural communities

Does your proposal impact island and mainland rural communities? No

Island and mainland rural communities screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to island and mainland rural communities? No difference

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Climate change

Does the proposal involve activities that could impact on greenhouse gas emissions (CO_2e)? Yes

Does the proposal have the potential to affect the environment, wildlife or biodiversity? No

Does the proposal have the potential to influence resilience to extreme weather or changing

climate? Yes

Provide information regarding your selection above: Climate action is a thematic priority section in the 2024-2027 CLD plan. Also a key case study in the update relates to work in this area.

Climate change screening assessment

Have you identified potential impact for any of the areas above or marked any as not known? No

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Highland Community Planning Partnership | Com-pàirteachas Dealbhadh Coimhearsnachd na Gàidhealtachd

Community Learning and Development (CLD) Annual Report 2025-26

Appendix 2

Community Learning & Development (CLD) Annual Report 2025-26

Executive Summary for Education Committee

Community Learning and Development: Making a Difference Across Highland

In 2025-26, Community Learning and Development (CLD) partners continued to respond to poverty, inequality, rural isolation, and workforce challenges while supporting people and communities to develop the confidence, skills, resilience, and connections needed to thrive. Despite a challenging operating environment, evidence from across Highland demonstrates that CLD continues to deliver meaningful and measurable changes for individuals, families, and communities.

What Has Changed?

CLD activity across Highland is increasingly moving beyond participation towards evidencing impact. Across the seven priorities of the Highland CLD Plan, learners are reporting improved wellbeing, stronger community connections, increased confidence, greater influence in decisions affecting their lives, improved digital participation, progression into learning, volunteering and employment, and increased community resilience.

Key developments during 2025-26 include:

- Across Highland, adult learners aged 16-93 completed over 33,000 hours of learning, achieving qualifications and improving their skills, confidence and life chances. Adult Learning strengthened its trauma-informed approach by becoming an accredited centre, supporting empowerment, resilience and recovery.
- Increased investment in community-based mental health and wellbeing support from £851,520 Community Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund investment and £397,222 from the Children and Young People's Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund.
- Strengthened youth participation with the launch of Highland Youth Parliament's first manifesto and the continued development of the Participation Action Tracker framework.
- Expansion of preventative approaches through Whole Family Wellbeing Programme in 9 Community Planning Partnership areas and Planet Youth partnerships across 13 school communities.
- Continued growth in recognised learning and youth achievement, including with 748 awards, qualifications and achievements gained by young people
- Development of innovative workforce pathways, making Highland Council the only local authority in Scotland with developmental approval for three in-house CLD qualifications.
- Significant growth in climate and sustainability engagement, with Countryside Rangers CLD engagement increasing by 57% from 8,109 to 12,746 interactions and outdoor learning projects in communities.

At a Glance: Progress Against CLD Outcomes

CLD Priority	Evidence of Progress	Distance still to Travel
Mental Health & Wellbeing	Strong evidence of increased confidence, reduced isolation, improved wellbeing, and stronger community connections.	Demand for support continues to rise, particularly in rural areas and among men.
Voice & Participation	Youth voice increasingly influencing planning and policy. Learner forums strengthening adult participation.	Need to ensure learner voice consistently leads to visible change and decision making.
Digital Inclusion	Increased digital skills support, device provision, and digital champion networks.	Significant digital poverty, connectivity challenges, and service capacity gaps remain.
Employability, Volunteering & Training	Strong achievement in awards, volunteering, and progression pathways into employment.	More targeted support is needed for those furthest from the labour market through partnership working.
Community Development & Resilience	Communities leading solutions, securing assets, funding, and developing local services.	Sustainability of community organisations remains dependent on funding certainty.
Aligning Partnership Practices	Stronger collaboration with local authorities, CLD Standards Council, YouthLink Scotland and Learn North workforce development, and shared learning.	Workforce recruitment and retention continue to be significant challenges.
Climate & Social Justice	Increased participation in sustainability, climate education, and community action.	Need to embed climate justice understanding more consistently across all CLD activities.

The Bigger Story

The evidence within this report demonstrates that CLD outcomes are interconnected.

- When an adult learner gains digital skills, they are better able to access benefits, employment, healthcare, and learning opportunities.
- When a young person builds confidence through youth work, they are more likely to attend school, gain qualifications, and progress into positive destinations.
- When communities develop stronger local organisations, they become more resilient, better connected and more able to respond to poverty, isolation, and inequality.
- When people feel heard, included, and connected, they experience improved wellbeing and are more likely to contribute positively to their communities.

Taken together, these outcomes contribute directly to Highland Council's ambitions around poverty reduction, prevention, community resilience, educational attainment, health improvement, and economic inclusion.

Unmet Need and Challenges

Across Highland, the following challenges continue to be highlighted:

- Rural and transport poverty continue to limit access to services and employment.
- Digital exclusion remains a barrier for many individuals and communities.
- Communities face uncertainty due to short-term funding models.
- Demand for mental health and wellbeing support continues to grow.
- Recruitment and retention challenges affect the sustainability of the CLD workforce.
- Children and young people continue to highlight concerns around poverty, housing, transport, and access to opportunities.

Creating Solutions

CLD partners are responding through:

- Strengthening Children's Rights and Participation and capturing Learner Voice.
- Integrated partnership prevention approaches.
- Digital Champion programmes and digital inclusion partnerships.
- Grow Our Own workforce development pathways.
- Community-led solutions and capacity building.
- Increased collaboration through local and regional partnership structures.

Looking Ahead: What's Next?

Year 3 of the Highland CLD Plan 2024-27 will focus on:

Strengthening Impact

- Continuing to improve how we measure and evidence the difference CLD makes to people's lives and communities.

Prevention and Early Intervention

- Expanding approaches that tackle issues before they reach crisis point, particularly around mental health, poverty and school engagement.

Digital and Social Inclusion

- Reducing barriers to participation through improved digital skills, connectivity, and inclusive learning opportunities.

Community Resilience

- Supporting communities to lead local solutions and strengthen capacity in response to ongoing economic and social challenges.

Workforce Development

- Growing a skilled and sustainable CLD workforce through professional learning, qualifications, and partnership approaches.

Amplifying Learner Voice

- Ensuring that children, young people, adult learners and community members continue to shape services, influence decisions and contribute to the future of Highland communities.

Community Learning and Development continues to play a vital role in helping people and communities across Highland respond to challenges, realise potential and create positive change. The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that CLD is not simply delivering activities; it is improving wellbeing, reducing inequalities, strengthening communities, and creating opportunities for people to thrive. While significant challenges remain, particularly around poverty, rurality and workforce sustainability, the progress achieved during 2025-26 provides a strong foundation for the next stage of the CLD Plan and a clear demonstration of the value of CLD to the people and communities of Highland



CLD Priority 1: Mental Health & Wellbeing

Outcome: CLD Learners experience improved mental health and wellbeing

CLD in Practice – spotlight on Mental Health & Wellbeing

Flip of the Coin takes a holistic approach to Creative Community Health and Wellbeing

Flip of the Coin operates The Flipside in Alness and supports people from across Easter Ross through community-based creative health and wellbeing provision. Projects include the **Art of Wellbeing**, **Growing Connections** and **Roots to Recovery** which use growing spaces, alongside creativity, shared food, peer support, and opportunities to spend time with other people with an emphasis on building relationships, confidence, connection and belonging.

Flip of The Coin increases engagement in community learning for adults who may not traditionally access education or training providing community-based learning environments for people who face barriers to participation. They build confidence and practical skills as a route into further learning, qualifications and employment, recognising the importance of creating supported progression routes rather than expecting people to move directly into formal education or employment. The potential for the model is to strengthen links between creative activity, community learning, recognised qualifications and wider employability.

Alness and Easter Ross are within the 20% most deprived areas in Highland having:

- Poverty and low household income
- Rural isolation
- Transport poverty
- Fuel poverty and increasing household costs
- Loneliness and social isolation
- Poor mental health and wellbeing
- School absence and disrupted education
- Alcohol and drug-related harms
- Difficulty accessing specialist services
- Low engagement with wellbeing services among some groups - men make up 11% of attendees

Impact Report 2025-26

- ✓ Approximately 265 people have been supported at the Flipside in 2025-26
- ✓ 185 (70%) of people were referred through statutory referral pathways - GPs, Community Link Workers, Mental Health services, Social Work and Justice Services
- ✓ This demonstrates the level of need within the community and the extent to which community organisations are supporting, and complementing, statutory provision
- ✓ The typical weekly attendance or engagement is approximately 60 people
- ✓ Upon attending the Flipside, 82% of participants reported loneliness when they initially engaged with the organisation.
- ✓ After six weeks of engagement, 93% reported feeling more optimistic about the future.
- ✓ During one Flip of the Coin monitoring period, 132 participants were recorded including 101 women, 17 children and 14 men. Men therefore represented approximately 11% of all participants recorded during this period.



Measures of impact	Evidence of impact	BRAG

Learners have increased feelings of confidence	**Highland Council Adult Learning - Community on a Plate Event – A celebration of World Food & Culture** Refugee Festival Scotland is an annual national celebration of the contributions, resilience and creativity of refugees and people seeking sanctuary. In Highland, the festival provided an opportunity to promote inclusion, strengthen community connections and celebrate the diversity and contribution of New Scots. Highland is home to diverse refugee and migrant communities, including people from Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine, living across the region. The festival provided a positive opportunity for communities to come together, share culture and build understanding. It also created spaces for dialogue and connection at a time when there had been evidence of community tensions and concerns about prejudice and discrimination towards refugees and people seeking asylum.  Working through the Highland Integration Network, Adult Learning, Comraich and Inspiring Young Voices/Connect supported a programme of Refugee Festival activities. Learners played an active role in planning and delivering events, sharing their languages, traditions, food, music, art and personal experiences through a co-produced approach. Two community events were delivered in Inverness, alongside smaller activities and simple acts of welcome across Highland. The events brought together adult learners, refugees and migrants, community members and partners to **cook, create, share and celebrate together* **What difference did this make?** • Created safe, welcoming spaces where people from different backgrounds could meet, connect and build relationships. • Promoted intercultural understanding, encouraging curiosity, cultural exchange and deeper conversations about shared experiences as well as differences. • Provided opportunities for learners to lead, contribute and showcase their skills, knowledge and culture, strengthening confidence and learner voice. • Supported community cohesion by providing positive opportunities for people to come together and challenge negative stereotypes and misinformation. • Created a gateway into Adult Learning, with the events enabling people who were not currently accessing learning opportunities to connect with the service. • Strengthened awareness of the contribution of Adult Learning to integration, diversity and inclusion. • The events also generated wider benefits, including stronger relationships with partners, new friendships between learners and opportunities to identify and respond to learners' needs	

One particularly significant outcome was the opportunity for learner Natalia to lead an art workshop. The experience increased her confidence in both her artistic abilities and her use of English, while participants reported that they greatly enjoyed the workshop and requested further opportunities. Traditional music, food and cultural presentations were also highly valued. A presentation by learner Nadiia was particularly well received, with participants describing it as both informative and moving. The shared food brought by participants created another powerful opportunity for cultural exchange and conversation.

Community on a Plate - Next steps

The model was evaluated as simple, effective and highly valued by learners, partners and the wider community. There is strong potential to establish this as an annual community ESOL activity linked to Refugee Festival Scotland, continuing to provide learner-led opportunities for cultural exchange, community connection, confidence-building and progression into Adult Learning.
Building on the benefits that came from sharing culture, perspectives and "breaking bread" with others, a consortium of adult learning and youth work colleagues are working on establishing a Community Learning Kitchen – a food-based learning hub that uses cooking, nutrition, and shared meals as tools for adult learning, family learning, youth work and community development. Using our existing resources including our catering kitchen, training rooms and community garden, the team plans to develop a space for learning centred around a weekly hot meal – everyone welcome!

As part of the Highland Integration Network, the Highland Adult Learning Delivery Group and the CLD Practitioners Networks, we worked collaboratively through our networks to promote our event and engaged with a wide cross section of the community. The event and activities were free. Refugees, people seeking asylum and all our ESOL learners were invited to involved in the planning of the event. By bringing diverse communities together to cook, sharing food, and exchanging cultures, the event resulted in building understanding, solidarity, and resulted in new friendships being formed. We believe it has left a legacy of confidence, connection and has strengthened our community.









Ukrainian Folk Art Workshop delivered by learners Natalia



Learners and members of the community brought in food to share

Music provided by our friends at Fèis the Music (Fèis Rois)



Natalia our Learner leading the art workshop with Robbie the piper

"Around 150 people attended the event which was a great success. Learners were so pleased to be included in the planning and delivery of workshops, presentations and food preparation. Our team received very positive feedback and a desire to do this more often. It was great to see people of all different cultures come together, to share with one another and enjoy the event. It is vital to celebrate the input of New Scots into their communities and recognise the rich and diverse cultures living in Inverness." Adult Learning Coordinator

A first journey to Inverness: Building Confidence and Connections

One of the Adult Learners who attends ESOL English classes in Dingwall joined the community event organised by the Adult Learning (AL) team in Inverness for Refugee Festival. Along with the Adult Learning Coordinator (Marie), they travelled by bus from Dingwall to Inverness and then walked to the James Cameron Centre. It was a great opportunity for learners to connect with others and practise speaking English together.

Rokaiha, another learner, also joined the outing with her daughter, which was a very pleasant surprise and they met Naher, who had recently moved to Dingwall. At the event, everyone appeared to have a good time. Other Learners met up with Ukrainian friends who live in Inverness and were very enthusiastic. Marie drove back to Dingwall with Rokaiha and Naher. Naher thanked her several times, saying how happy she was to have gone to Inverness and how much she had enjoyed the day. It was her first time travelling by bus and her husband called Marie earlier in the week saying she had never been to Inverness on her own before. Marie reassured him saying that she will stay with Naher during the outing. Marie is very pleased that she was able to join and that so many other learners attended. The event provided valuable opportunities for social interaction, confidence-building, and practising English in a real-life context.



The Story of Adult Learning – 50 Years since the Alexander Report 1975

The Story of Adult Learning covers 50 Years of community-based adult learning in Highland from the Alexander Report 1975 to the present day and beyond, and was produced by THC Adult Learning Manager, Roisin Irvine. A touring Exhibition and Educational workshops throughout 2026 are being supported by THC Adult Learning Team in community spaces across Highland to showcase the wealth of history and artefacts reflecting / celebrating on and learning from the last 50 years of Adult Learning extending from the Alexander report in 1975, which formed the basis of Community Education and its evolution into CLD. At its heart, it is a story of people, of self-determination, and the enduring desire to progress.
An externally funded International Learning excursion to Dublin in November 2025 enabled Learner leaders and staff travelling and learning together from peers in Ireland at an Aontas Conference.



Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival (SMHAF) Highland in Pulteney Town Peoples Project, Wick

The Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival (SMHAF) in Highland had the theme of Reflection" for 2026 and welcomed many groups to Pulteney Town Peoples Project, Wick.

Additionally, some of the projects from Arts in Nature working with Mikeysline and reflections from Lived Experience from Caithness Experience Matters Advisory Panel (CExMAP) HUG (Action for Mental Health) were shown as films at Eden Court Theatre, Inverness.





Castletown Coastal Connections at SMHAF

Coastal Connections in Castletown has launched a new social hub in the perfect opportunity to make the new Peer–To–Peer Led Community Group is open to everyone in Caithness or to anyone who would like to have a look and find out what a P2P Led Community Group is all about. The Caithness Experience Matters Advisory Panel (CExMAP) provides an opportunity for friends to catch up with familiar faces and to hear the exciting plans for Coastal Connections over cake and a cuppa.

Arts in Nature at SMHAF

The Arts in Nature Art Club partnered with Mikeysline for the Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival (SMHAF). The families had lots of fun making nature-print zines using natural materials, ink pads and plasticine and all agreed, that patterns in nature are amazing. They also created colourful insects and even spotted a tiny snail who had come to visit on our gathered leaves.
Arts in Nature have recently inspired other Highland groups to embed creative arts and nature in their work:

- **Personal Palettes from Nature** with the Thriving Families team as part of their staff team gathering.
- **Nature Nurture** mixed media afternoon in the forest classroom with Abriachan Forest Trust Abriachan Community.
- **Colours in Nature** session with one of Dingwall Academy creatives groups, in collaboration with Dingwall 800.

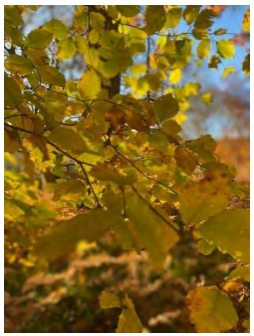


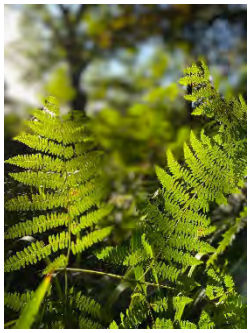




Green Tree Arts at SMHAF

Green Tree Arts Studio integrate art and the natural world to support wellbeing and creativity. Delivering art therapy and Tree of Life programmes that promote self-expression, resilience, and meaningful change. Opportunities for individuals & groups.




Inverness OpenArts at SMHAF Inverness OpenArts provides free, inclusive art sessions for adults (16+) at Inverness Creative Academy to support creativity, confidence, and community wellbeing. Arts activities include stamp and printmaking, matchbox dioramas, Boro Japanese-inspired fabric collage and Winter wreath making.



Torridon Wellbeing Walks at SMHAF

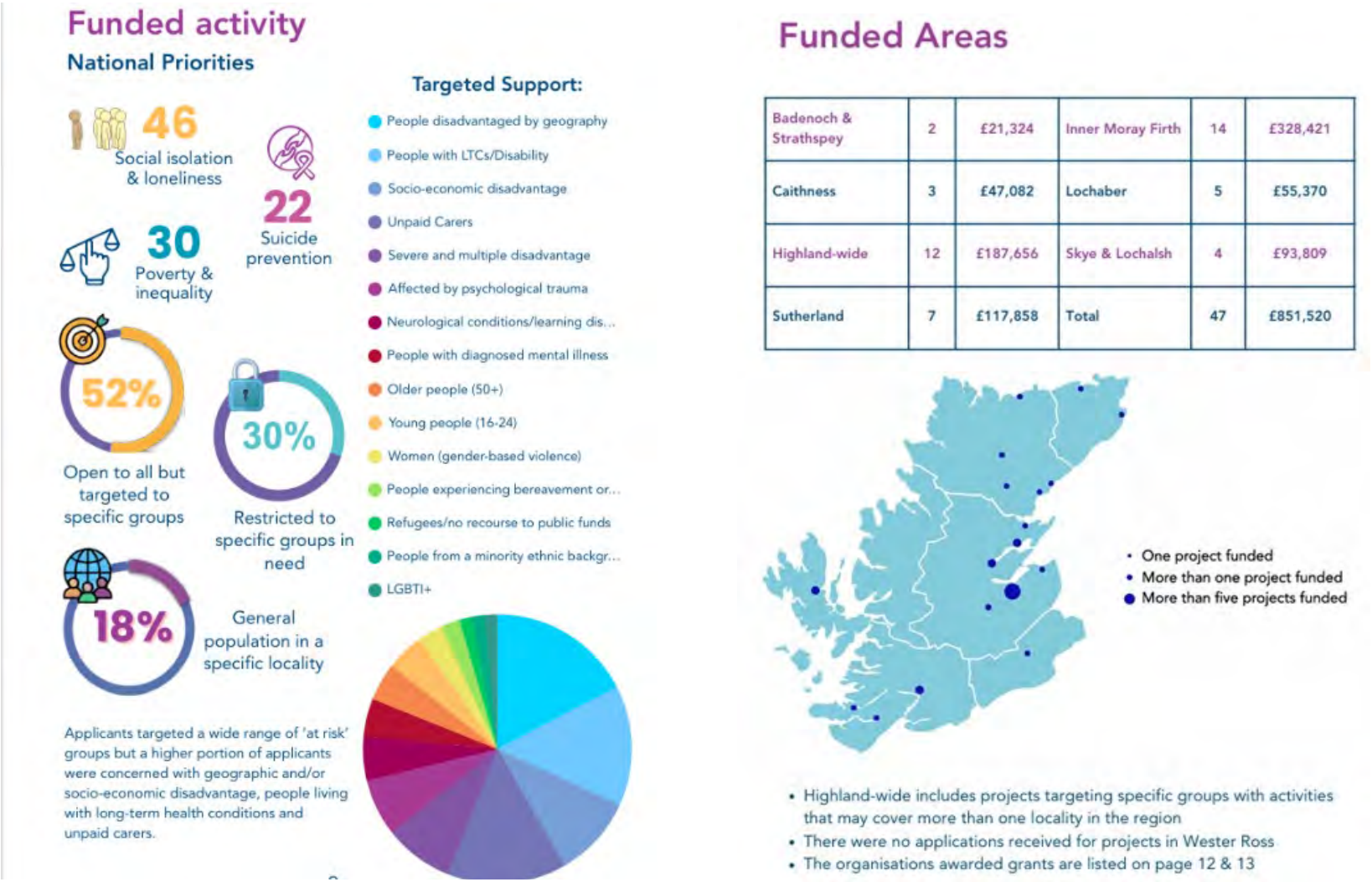
Torridon Wellbeing Walks from Torridon Nature Trust Reserve NTS are part of this year's SMHAF Highland Festival with the theme of Reflection. The Wellbeing Walk took place in Inveralligin on the north shore of Loch Torridon in Wester Ross where the group supported the "Walk a Mile in Our Shoes" campaign which aims to raise awareness of mental health issues in the Highlands. The weather even stayed dry for them.

Retreats for Geeks, Aviemore

The Retreats for Geeks group was originally developed through the Aviemore Youth Forum in response to the needs of young people who were looking for opportunities to socialise and build friendships, but who didn't necessarily feel comfortable in the hustle and bustle of a traditional youth club or sports group. A **Neurodiverse Group for those who were Autistic.** The group initially had a different name (Autistic and Likeminded People), but the young people themselves decided to change this to Retreats for Geeks. This was important to them as they wanted something that felt welcoming and reflected their interests, without necessarily placing a label on them.

	The group started with just 3–4 young people attending. It has continued to grow and now regularly attracts around 10–15 young people each week during term time. The young people have always been central to deciding what activities they would like to take part in, with the group developing around their interests, friendships and ideas. An important part of the success has been consistent Youth Development Officer (YDO) support. Having familiar, trusted adults involved on a regular basis has helped young people to build confidence and develop positive relationships over time. Importantly, those relationships and the trust established through the group can then transfer into other settings, including school, other groups and opportunities. Having a familiar and friendly face they already know, and trust can make a significant difference for young people who may otherwise find it difficult to engage with new adults or services.  The YDO also encouraged The Highland One Stop Shop who have also supported the initiative by attending approximately once a month, providing an opportunity for young people and families to access advice and support in an informal and familiar setting. What has been particularly positive is seeing the journey from social isolation and exclusion towards greater confidence, friendships and wider social inclusion. Young people who initially only attended Retreats for Geeks are now engaging with other groups and opportunities, including LGBTQ+ youth events, helping to organise games and activities, and having their voices heard in wider youth participation opportunities. What has been particularly positive is seeing the **journey from social isolation and exclusion towards greater confidence**, friendships and wider social inclusion. Young people who initially only attended Retreats for Geeks are now **engaging with other groups and opportunities**, including LGBTQ+ youth events, helping to organise games and activities, and having their voices heard in wider youth participation opportunities	
Learners have reduced feelings of loneliness & isolation	**HTSI Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund 2025-26 Year 5** Established in 2021, the Scottish Government Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund (CMH&WF) has been a lifeline to communities in Highland over the past 5 years with 331 separate grants being awarded to 490 organisations with a total investment exceeding £3,900,000. The grants have supported a wide range of activities for adults aged 16 and above, showcasing various approaches to enhance community wellbeing, build capacity and resilience within the sector and prevent individuals from reaching crisis point. In **2025-26 47 projects** were awarded **£851,520** funding.	

A copy of the annual report can be found here [HTSI Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund Report 2025]

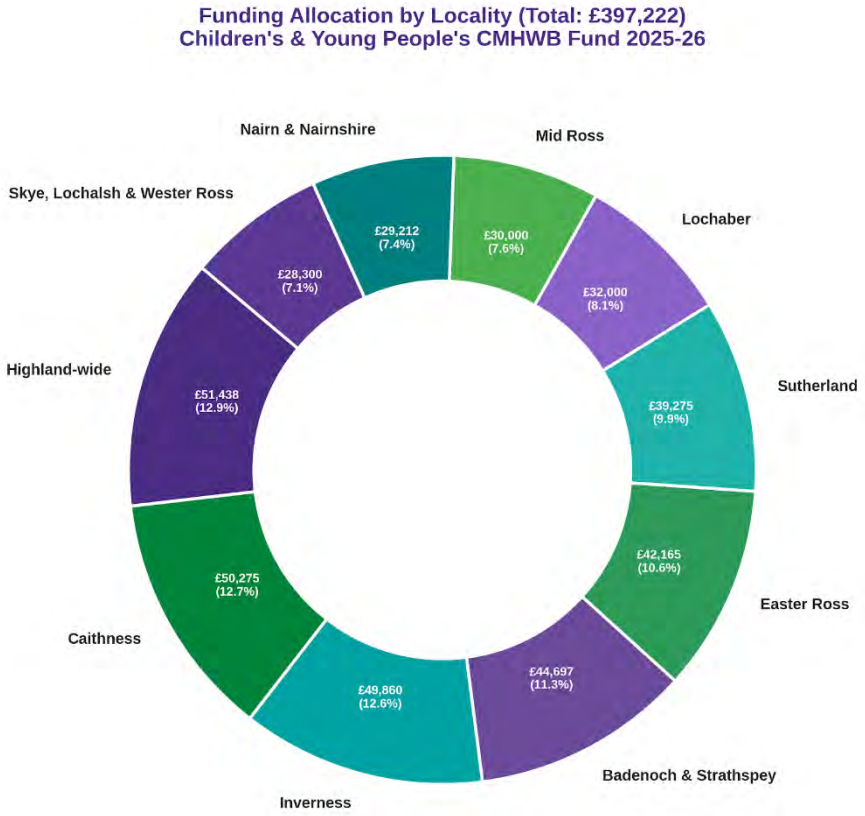


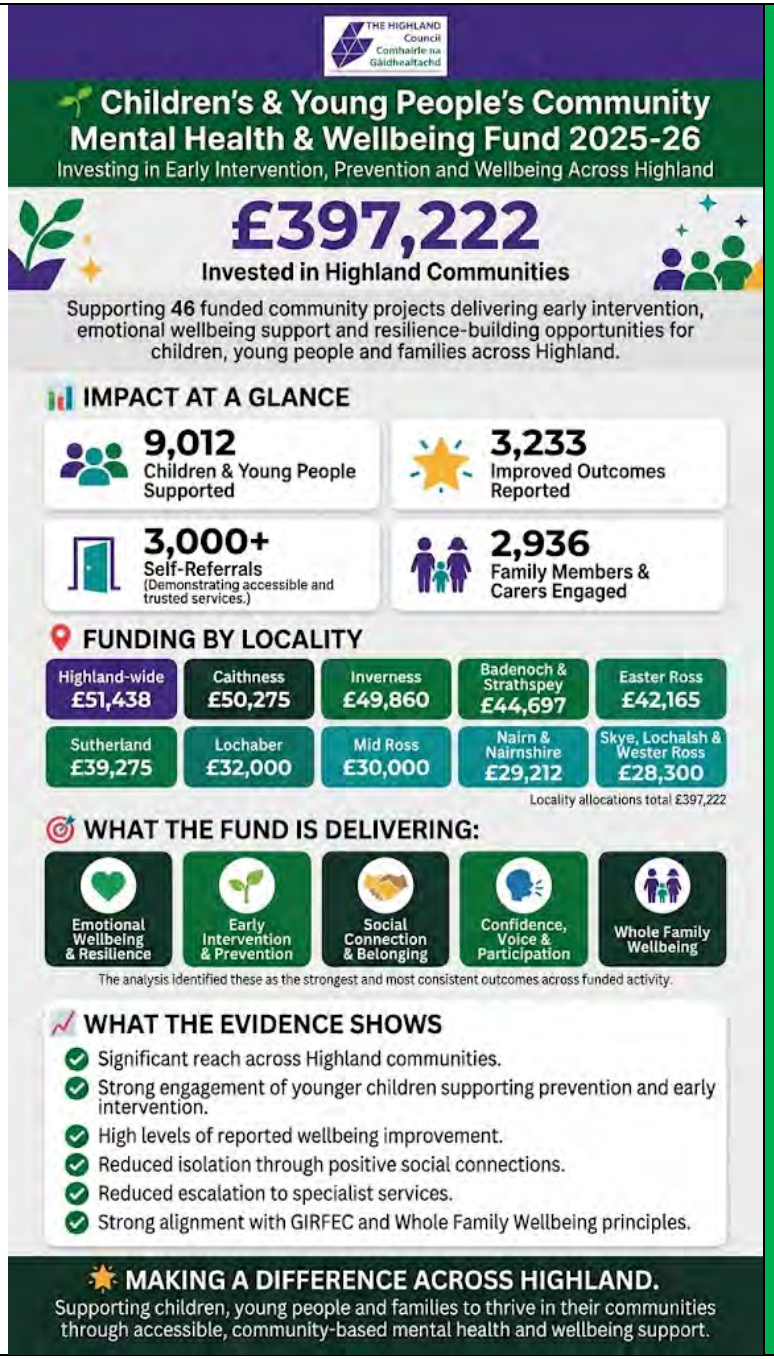
MICRO GRANTS - ONE YEAR	Amount	ADDED INVESTMENT - ONE YEAR	Amount
Acharacle Community Company	8,460	Apex Scotland	20,000
Befrienders Highland	9,780	Counselling Care Skye & Lochalsh	20,000

Blooming Gardeners	8,000	CVG (Befriending Caithness)	17,302		
Caithness and Sutherland Women's Aid	10,000	Highland Mindfulness Group	6,100		
Cruse Scotland	3,530	Inverness Foodstuff	15,000		
Go Golspie Development Trust	10,000	LEAP Sports Scotland	15,500		
Highland Yoga Collective CIC	5,680	Minority Ethnic Carers & Older People (MECOP)	20,000		
Inspiring Young Voices	10,000	Reach4Reality	6,260		
Inverness Womens Aid	7,680	Relationship Scotland	20,000		
Lochaber Hope	10,000	Voluntary Action Lochaber	13,330		
Partnerships for Wellbeing	10,000	**COLLABORATIVE GRANTS (Lead Applicants)**			
Voluntary Action Lochaber	6,870	ACI Recovery Services	48,480		
SMALL GRANTS - TWO YEARS		Creativity in Care (SMHAFH)	30,600		
Caithness and Sutherland Women's Aid	20,000	Fèis Rois	43,065		
Calman Trust	19,560	For You Training (Farmer Jones Academy CIC)	47,007		
Compass Collective	7,115	Inverness Foodstuff	35,000		
Engaging With Activity CIC	10,614	Inverness OpenArts	38,984		
Finding Your Feet	8,232	Lochview Rural Training	48,225		
Lochview Rural Training Centre	18,620	New Start Highland	25,000		
Mhor Outdoor Ltd	11,024	Skye & Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Orgs.	34,209		
North Sutherland Community Forestry Trust	9,456	CAPACITY BUILDING - ONE YEAR			
Roots and Shoots Highland CIC	15,644	Fares4Free (Vector24)	20,000		
Ross-Shire Women's Aid	19,600	Highland Well-Ness Collective	19,940		
Skye & Lochalsh Mental Health Association	20,000	Lairg and District Learning Centre	10,943		
Urram SCIO	16,710	Red Chair Highland CIC	20,000		
		TOTAL INVESTMENT YEAR FIVE	**£851,520**		

The Highland Council's Children and Young People's Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund 2025-26 is in its 5th year and is a vital investment in Highland communities to help tackle child poverty and inequality. More than 9,000 children and young people have been supported and approx. 2,900 family members and carers engaged through the 46 funded community projects via a process of 3,000+ referrals.

The positive outcomes achieved for children and young people include reduced isolation through positive social connections, improved wellbeing and reduced escalation to specialist services. The fund is making a difference across Highland helping children & young people.





Inspiring Young Voices

The Inspiring Young Voices ARTIVISM project is on a roadshow around the libraries in Highland as well as going online where you can view the online galleries of all the artwork sent to them by young people. At Fort William Library some of the artwork was on display as a visual representation of how young people in the Highlands feel and support their mental health.



Using a trauma-informed approach with ESOL Classes

M was referred by the Citizens' Advice Bureau to the Highland Council Adult Learning team in March 2024 to enquire about ESOL lessons after arriving in Inverness from elsewhere in Scotland. M came into the country as an asylum seeker two years ago but had just been granted refugee status. Struggling with his mental health and a difficult recent past, M decided to move to the Highlands for a fresh start in life. He needed to be away from crowds and unwelcome influences. At his initial assessment it was clear M wanted to work, sustain himself and improve his life, but he was unsure how to start – not being on a government supported refugee programme he had no allocated support worker once asylum had been granted.

M was determined, ambitious and committed to learn and attended his twice weekly ESOL classes diligently. However, life is frightening when you are alone in an unfamiliar culture and a new city with a new language trying to tackle the administrative minefield which is housing, universal credit, medical appointments and job searches. Regular Help Hub appointments were set up to help remove these barriers and the stress that comes with them, to enable M to concentrate on his studies and find a job.

M loves to fish and be in open spaces. He used to fish in his home country. We made enquiries and succeeded in acquiring a free fishing licence for him on the River Ness, as a Inverness resident. This enabled him to find some peace away from the pressures of living in the hostel. He was accompanied to New Start Highland for a volunteering position and was introduced to Red Chair digital support and Mhor collective supporting him with calls to housing, NHS services and accompanying him to the bank. He found housing in Wick so the Adult Learning team in Thurso met him off the train and showed him learning opportunities in Wick. This enabled M not only to make more informed decisions about his future but gave him a personal connection should he decide to move.

M's mental health means that new learning ventures are sometimes put on hold, but gentle consistent support enables him to feel safe and comfortable to return to Adult Learning for help when he feels able. Using a trauma informed approach, we are always aware of the trauma that M may have experienced in his past and meet him at the point he is at with a non-judgemental, listening ear.
With encouragement, M has to-date studied for and **passed his driving theory** and practical tests. He is now in his second year of **full-time ESOL study at college** working towards his **National 4 ESOL**. After support with applications and practice interviews with the

Adult Learning team, M was also offered a place on **National 4 professional cookery**. Alongside his ESOL study M has worked part-time jobs and has now been offered a **permanent contract in his current post**.

Social Enterprise Academy

The '**Wide Horizons'** programme for New Scots is delivered in partnership with New Start Highland in 2025-2026 with £25,000 HTSI MH&WB Fund and Scottish Government funding. The project aims to empower refugees and migrants to integrate in their communities, reducing isolation and improving mental health. It focusses on identifying and valuing their transferable skills through:



- Connecting with their community through volunteering
- Supporting them to recognise how they make a difference to their community
- Enable them to practise English in a supportive work environment
- Support them to gain social capital for their integration into Highland society
-



Impact

The programme had a meaningful impact on participants' mental health and wellbeing, particularly the ability to speak up, the feeling of belonging, purpose, and hope for the future, with a presentation "What does feeling at home mean to you?" created.

Finding my voice: Many participants joined feeling hesitant/unable to express themselves.

- One said, "I don't have my voice yet – it is closed. I want to speak my voice and be heard."
- By the end, participants reported increased confidence and agency: "I have a voice and I feel useful" "My confidence to speak more has increased and I feel like I can speak up" "At first, I was even scared to try to speak but now I try."

Belonging: Participants developed a stronger sense of connection to their communities:

- "I do not feel part of Scotland… I miss my home." By the end, this shifted: "Even if we are not born here, we are welcome here," and "I feel strongly about Scotland, it is my home, I know its history and its music."

Purpose and contribution: Many participants felt empowered to engage meaningfully:

- "I feel useful and that I have something to share," "I am going to start work as a volunteer at the hospital," "I'd like to work with kids."

Hope/future planning:

- "I have a plan for life, a big dream for myself and my family," and "I would like to go to university & apply what I have learned."

Overall, funding enabled participants to build confidence, foster belonging, and plan meaningful contributions to their communities, positively influencing mental health and wellbeing

Planet Youth Highland Community Fund Partnerships

In January 2026, The Planet Youth Highland Oversight Group, supported by the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme (WFWP), invited applications from third sector organisations to support the delivery of the Planet Youth health improvement approach across Highland. Planet Youth is a whole-systems, evidence-based, primary prevention model that aims to delay and reduce substance use and other negative risk-taking behaviours in children and young people by strengthening protective factors in their environments, including family, school, peer, and community settings. The approach is rooted in public health principles and aligns with the Scottish Government's National Principles of Holistic Whole Family Support.

Funding had been secured through the WFWP to enable the **commissioning of third sector organisations to embed part-time workers in each of the 13 school communities participating in Cycle 3 (2025–2027) of Planet Youth.** Through a funding application 13 agencies were chosen below out of 27 applications. Examples of Planet Youth partnership delivery projects with Tain YMCA, Aban Outdoor, Safe Strong & Free are developed later in this report.

Area	Organisation	Project
Wick	Caithness Klics	Young Carers and Planet Youth
Thurso	Thurso Community Cafe	Youth Development Group
Golspie	Brora Youth Room	Brora Youth club activities
Dornoch	Highland Thrive CIC	Planet Youth Dornoch Implementation Programme
Tain	Tain YMCA	Planet Youth Vision 2030
Invergordon	Clootie McToot Community Cafe	Invergordon outreach initiative
Alness	Alness Community Hub/Fox and Friends	Alness Community Hub project
Dingwall	Mikeysline	Mental Fitness Programme and other
Nairn	Safe Strong and Free	Stronger Together programme
Culloden Academy	Mikeysline	Mental Fitness Programme and other
Inverness High School	Aban Outdoor Ltd	Pathways to the Outdoors
Lochaber High School	The Nevis Centre	Youth Access Project
Plockton High School	Skye Bridge Studios 123	Community Youth Activity Programme

The Highland Council Attendance Project

The Attendance project involved working across 3 secondary schools - Alness Academy, Inverness High School and Invergordon Academy between June 2025 and August 2026. The aim of the project was to make school feel like a place where young people wanted to be, rather than attendance simply being something they were expected to achieve and treating attendance as an isolated issue.

- ✓ 6 Youth Support Officers were employed on fixed term contracts, 2 for each secondary school
- ✓ Focused on S2 cohort with attendance between 40% and 70%

A Youth Work approach was used to improve attendance and learning with an asset-based, learner-centred approach around 1-2-1 support and experiential group activities, connecting across school and community settings. Youth Support Officers and Third Sector organisations brought a varied approach to learning across the school day, offering a diverse range of activities through a partnership approach.

The project involved:

- Informal conversations and check-ins
- Identifying barriers
- Encouraging school routines
- Providing opportunities
- Connecting young people
- Working in partnership
- Celebrating small improvements

"It takes us out of classes we don't like so we don't skip the whole day." Young person



Relationships with young people were developed first through informal conversations and regular check-ins with Youth Support Officers (YSOs) being visible, approachable and consistent around providing support. When asked "What would make it easier to engage?" young people said they wanted the YSOs to take an interest in their individual interests and strengths, listen without judgement and follow through on commitments. The approach that worked:

Consistency + Trust + Communication = Engagement

Action Learning in the Attendance Project

- ✓ Building positive relationships: Create a trusted, consistent point of contact
- ✓ Improve school engagement: Help young people feel connected to school
- ✓ Support attendance: Understand barriers and encourage re-engagement
- ✓ Connect with community: Create opportunities beyond the classroom

"I feel more confident knowing my attendance has gone up it has made me feel better about coming to school. When my attendance was low it was causing trouble at home and making my anxiety worse about coming in." Young person

Relationship + Trust + Understanding + Opportunity = Engagement

- ✓ Young people in the attendance project based at school also started to attend community youth provision.

- ✓ Evidence suggests that attendance appears to be an outcome of improvements around the development of skills and by not focusing purely on attendance.
- ✓ Attendance improved by developing confidence, relationships, belonging, wellbeing, participation and achievement.
- ✓ Consistent with the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework - a powerful piece of evidence for the value of Youth Work approaches within Education.

Accessible menus at Café Artysans

A collaboration between Café Artysans and Calman Trust was spearheaded by Sarah, a visually impaired young person and member of Inspiring Young Voices group to introduce accessible menus, helping to make the café a more enjoyable place for people with visually impairments.



The Inspiring Young Voices team were proud to work with Café Artysans to introduce accessible menus, ensuring all customers can enjoy an inclusive experience. They worked in collaboration with accessibility and inclusion experts Direct Access to create menus in Braille and Large Print which are now available for customers to use. Café Artysans are committed to making eating out inclusive and accessible and will continue working to ensure everyone in our community feels welcome.

Inspiring Young Voices – Angus the Bear's First Day at School

Angus the Bear's First Day at School is a children's book created by young people involved in the Inspire Highland project through Inspiring Young Voices. The Story features a real teddy bear named Angus who lives in the Highlands with his best friend Hayley. Developed with writer Jen Hadfield and illustrator Katie Wilson, the book explores autism and hidden disabilities from the lived experiences of autistic young people, highlighting the challenges of unfamiliar environments like starting school. Free copies have been sent to every primary school and library across Highland to encourage empathy and inclusion discussions.



'Building Community Spaces' project in Badenoch & Strathspey supports young people's mental health

Up to **144 young people aged 12 to 18** in Badenoch & Strathspey will be able to access more mental health and wellbeing support in a two-year programme thanks to a **£106,500** grant from NHS Highland Charity Innovation Challenge Fund and National Lottery Heritage Fund.

	The Building Community Spaces project, developed by Dr Nick Barnes from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), in collaboration with organisations from across the locality, will support young people through local, community-based activities designed to help them get support earlier, before worries or challenges become harder to manage. Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) welcomes the boost to the Cairngorms 2030 public health work allowing them to build on existing nature prescription work and extend its reach to young people, strengthening links between green health, local activities and community support, to help young people benefit from the natural environment.		



CLD Priority 2: Voice, Inclusion & Participation

Outcome: CLD Learners increase their ability to influence change

CLD in Practice – spotlight on Voice, Inclusion & Participation

Adult Learner Forums - 48 attendees in Adult Learner Forums in 2025-26 and 13 active Learner Leader volunteers in Highland



Case Study: Tamara (Learning Leader) https://www.youtube.com/@AdultLearning-l4l/shorts

Tamara is a Ukrainian refugee and has lived in Aviemore for 3 years. She attended ESOL classes and a numeracy course 'Mathmagicians' with her son. When she arrived in Highland she could barely speak, barely understand anyone and didn't know a soul, so she 'felt like an alien'. Now she feels a part of the Aviemore community and has new friends and importantly, she has a feeling of support. She no longer feels 'invisible' and shares that is very important for people to realise that someone can have that feeling just from attending ESOL classes.

Tamara got involved in the Learning Leadership scheme which has different activities for Learners to get involved in. The case study in CLD priority 1 in the CLD report 'Community on a Plate' demonstrates the impact on Learners.

Strengthening learner voice

The Adult Learning Manager coordinated three Adult Learner Forums – Learner Meetup North, Learner Meetup West and Learner Meetup Central – engaging 48 adult learners from across Highland.

1. **Learner Meetup North** identified a desire to understand the longer-term reduction in adult learning provision and has begun work to analyse changes over the past 20 years.
2. **Learner Meetup Central** focused on understanding local democracy and how learners can play a more active role in civic life. The group invited their local Elected Member, Cllr Gregson, to attend a forum meeting and organised a visit to the Council Chamber, including a tour with the Leader and Convenor. Eleven adult learners participated.
3. **Learner Meetup West** invited the Member for Caol and Mallaig to attend its autumn meeting and began reviewing the use of dedicated adult learning space in Lochaber, with the aim of supporting more community-led learning activity throughout the week.



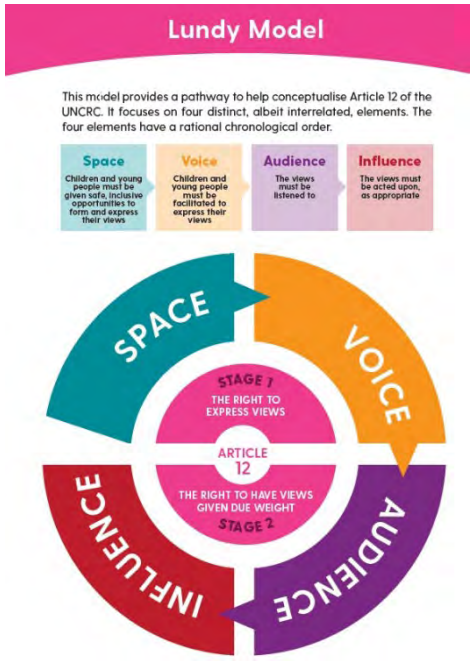
Together, the three Meetups form the Adult Learner Forum, which sits alongside Highland Adult Learning Delivery Group (HALDG) within the CLD governance structure. The Forum will shortly elect a representative to HALDG, strengthening learner voice and intersectionality within the Delivery Group and ensuring that Adult Learners have a more direct role in influencing CLD planning and service development.

How does it work?

Every Adult Learner has an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) which is updated every three months. The ILP asks, "To what extent has your confidence increased since your last ILP review?" **Voice & Participation Data** are collated as examples of integrated learner voice practice e.g.

1. Learners in Inverness, who had previously engaged in digital skills but found it difficult to progress onto further learning, have developed their own Wellbeing Café – a social space for learning centred on wellbeing literacy and grown from a collective understanding of their needs.

2. Learners in Inverness wrote to the bus company who had recently cancelled the route that took them from home to their Adult Learning activities and the bus route was reinstated. Learners spoke directly to the local newspaper on the matter.

Measures of impact	Evidence of impact	BRAG
Learners report increased ability to have a say in things that matter to them	**Participation Framework** The Children's Rights and Participation Highland website refers to the Hub na nÓg Framework developed by Professor Laura Lundy of Queens University, Belfast which is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making supports youth workers and organisations to improve their participation practice with children and young people. The Highland Children and Young People's Participation Strategy Library of Voices summary up to June 2026 is shown in the table below:   The **Highland Council Youth Service** use the **Participation Action tracker (PAT)** to capture the views of young people in everyday youthwork spaces, making sure their voices are heard and acted upon. Guided by the **Lundy Model of Participation**, an opportunity is created for young people to share their views, ensure they reach the right audience, and support them to influence decisions that affect their lives.	

Through the PAT triage process, each piece of feedback is reviewed and either acted on locally, used to improve services, shared to support wider conversations at a Highland wide level, added to the Library of Voices, or passed to the people and organisations who can make change happen. This process has supported the connection of local youth voice with Highland wide priorities and partners, ensuring that participation leads to real action and impact.

Participatory Action Tracker (PAT)

- Consistent way to record voice
- Evidence of participation
- Ensures young people's views are not lost
- Supports decision making
- Supports links in voice and participation Highland and Scotland wide
- Supports the Lundy Model by ensuring voice leads to audience and influence



88 PATs have been submitted and triaged

- The issues raised in the speech bubbles opposite have been acted upon
- Feedback is shared with schools, partners and services.
- Young people's views informed the decision making and planning
- The next challenge is to ensure the PAT's reach the right audience and influence decisions, services and opportunities that affect young people.

Nothing/Local Action	•Local action taken, no wider influence required, feedback shared with young people
Feed Back into Youth Service	•To influence future work, helps to shape delivery and planning, share good practice
Pan Highland	•To enable discussions across Highland services and to support conversations with decision makers who can influence change
Library of Voices	•To ensure young peoples voice are heard and to avoid consulting them more than once on the same issues
Voice Process	•To ensure young peoples views are heard by the appropriate decision makers and influence change where needed

Badenoch & Strathspey Digital Resilience

A successful partnership between Highland Council's Youth Development Badenoch & Strathspey and the Third Sector organisation IRL (In Real Life) Education has led to the recognition of outstanding achievements for young people through Dynamic Youth Awards, SQA Employability and Qualifications. Various projects and initiatives undertaken by the young people include producing radio shows, organising activities for local primary schools, completing and passing SQA Employability Qualification and First Aid at Work qualification, along with others.

The celebration of youth achievements was a result of the partnership between Youth Development Officer (YDO) Paul Jarvis and Hannah Mitchell, Director IRL (In Real Life) Education - a social enterprise which provides personalised employability, wellbeing and transition support for young people aged 14–25 across Badenoch & Strathspey.



IRL Education provides one-to-one mentoring, group sessions, action planning, employer engagement and skills development, that help young people build confidence, overcome barriers and move towards positive destinations in education, employment or training.

irl ed.



Badenoch & Strathspey Digital Resilience: PAT Case study using the Lundy Model

SPACE	VOICE	AUDIENCE	INFLUENCE	REVIEW

Information from the Badenoch & Strathspey Digital Resilience project on the PAT form was shared at the Triage meeting co-ordinated by the Youth Work North Area Officer. The Senior YDO for participation and the Highland Youth Convenor (HYC) (Leah) shared this with HYP Exec Committee to support wider conversations and link with Leah's priority on Online safety, suggesting the inclusion of Paul and Leah's work at Highland Child Protection team's Online Harm event in March 2026 for practitioners and parents. This facilitated the sharing of good practice and information on what was provided and what other services can provide which helped other services and parents/carers understand what young people need.

HYP Exec inclusion at HYP conference sessions:

- Paul and Leah shared project model, materials and findings with YDOs, young people and partner organisations at the HYP conference in September 2026
- Sharing good voice and participation practice amongst the service and other organisations
- Young people's voices can influence decisions and service provision around their online spaces and will be included in the HYP 2026 Manifesto

Badenoch & Strathspey LGBTQ+ support sessions: PAT Case study – local and pan-Highland integration

SPACE	VOICE	AUDIENCE	INFLUENCE	REVIEW

Information about the LGBT+ project on the PAT form was shared at the Triage meeting and the Senior YDO and Highland Youth Convenor (HYC) shared with HYP Exec Committee to support wider conversations. The Senior YDO shared Paul's work with Highland Council Equalities Network, Derek Sawyer for practitioners (teaching and CLD staff), which helped other services and parents/carers understand what young people need. Sharing good practice and information on what was provided and what other services can provide, Derek and Paul connected with the young people's involvement in the LGBT and Equalities groups. SYDO and Paul were invited to LGBT Youth Scotland consultation on needs of Highland young people. Paul shared feedback from B&S and SYDO feedback from HYP conference, helping other services understand what LGBTQ+ young people need and to help shape their services for LGBT young people. LGBT young people's voices can influence decisions and service provision and will be included in the HYP 2026 Manifesto.



Through the PAT, feedback from LBTQ+ young people in Badenoch and Strathspey was captured and recorded and shared beyond the local area. Young people highlighted the need for safe, accessible support, greater understanding and improved services in rural areas. Their views were discussed through the PAT triage process and shared with HYP exec and HC Equalities Network.

The Highland Youth Parliament (HYP) Conference 2026

The Highland Youth Parliament (HYP) conference took place on Thursday 24 September in Eden Court Theatre. Having celebrated its 25th birthday last year, Highland Youth Parliament has turned its focus from raising issues to driving action.

	At this year's conference, young people launched HYP's first ever official manifesto: "Our Voices, Our Future, Our Highland." The work coordinated by Highland Council's Youth Service and supported by youth partner organisations has also supported Inverness-Highland's bid to become UK City of Culture in 2029.	 	

HYP Conference 2026

This year's conference was sponsored by the Highland Employer Charter, free initiative that champions good employment practice across the Highlands and is supported by 35 Highland Council Youth Work and Education Service staff.

Projects including Work Force North, Sarah Cairney's Seaside Mail project, Paul Jarvis, B&S YDO's Digital resilience, Helen Michie's ASN Outdoor Learning Programme in Ardnamurchan, Sublime News from Thurso, Growing2gether, Youth Highland's Zines, IYV's Artivism, Filming with Leah on 'how to speak to young people - tips for adults' and HYP members Tyler and Lucy helped the HC media team with filming and photography.

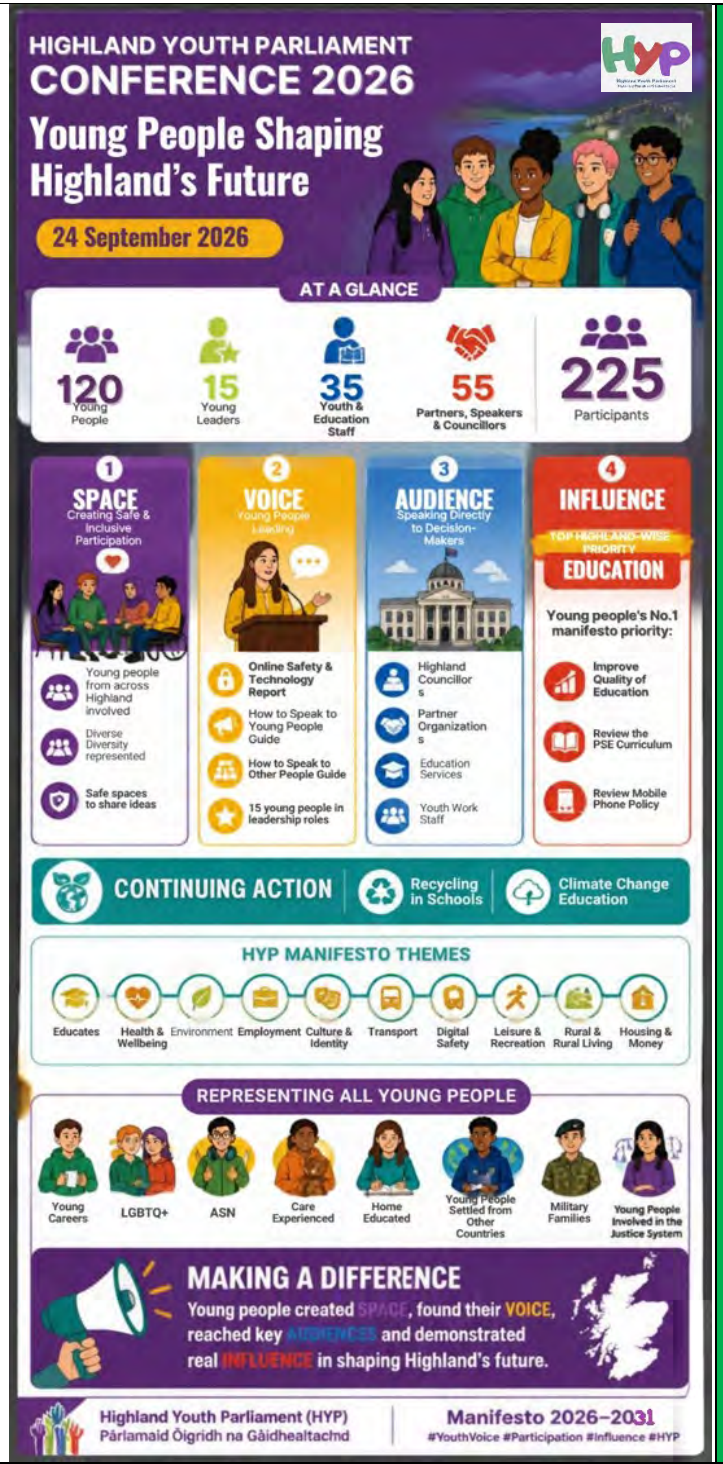
Local employers hosted stalls with approximately 55 partners from Inspiring Young Voices, Growing2gether, Youth Highland, High Life Highland, HC Employability service, HC Local Development Plan team, Climate Change team, Educational Psychology team, Workforce North, Nature Scot and NHS Highland, Safe, Strong and Free, RASASH and Red Cross SafeMates, creating opportunities for partnership working.

Council members joined the young people to hear of the issues that matter to them and the actions they would like to take with young people. The Highland Council's new Chief Officer for Education, Kirsty Macpherson gave the closing remarks noting the "Highland Council is listening to young people and want to work with young people in future to share good practice and make improvements for young people across Highland where required.

The **UK City of Culture Bid Youth Ambassadors**, Michael Lewis and Lily Kelman and Charleston Youth Choir and Mason McClurg and his band gave inspiring words through voice and song. Primary schools took part in a HYP postcard competition with submissions depicting environmental action they would like to see happening in their areas from preventing wildfires, protecting wildlife, litter picking and not feeding seagulls









Cllr John Finalyson, Chair of Highland Council's Education Committee, said: "I am really looking forward to hearing what young people have to say on issues that matter to them. The Highland Council and partners are keen to work with young people on their HYP manifesto actions to help preserve the best of Highland life and make improvements for their daily lives and futures too."

Jake MacCulloch, Chair of Highland Youth Parliament (HYP) said: "It's great knowing that young people are being listened to and that we can help shape decisions that affect our future. The HYP is an amazing opportunity for young people, and we want everyone who is taking part to go home encouraged that they can make a real difference in their communities." Jake's opening and closing speeches to welcome everyone to the conference and thank them for being part of the day were in Gaelic & English.

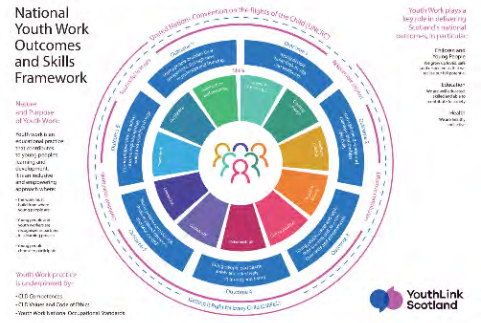
Outgoing Highland Youth Convener, Leah McBain said**:** "I'm really grateful for the experience I have had in the unique and special role of Highland Youth Convener. It has given me opportunities I never thought I'd have. I've met new people, learned new skills, and felt like my opinions, and the views of other young people, genuinely matter."



Bryan Beattie, UK City of Culture Bid Lead for Inverness – Highlands also gave some inspiring words to young people noting the Highland area is rich in culture, communities and connections but also acknowledged that we in the Highlands need to work on being more confident, putting ourselves forward and highlighted the importance of knowing your worth!

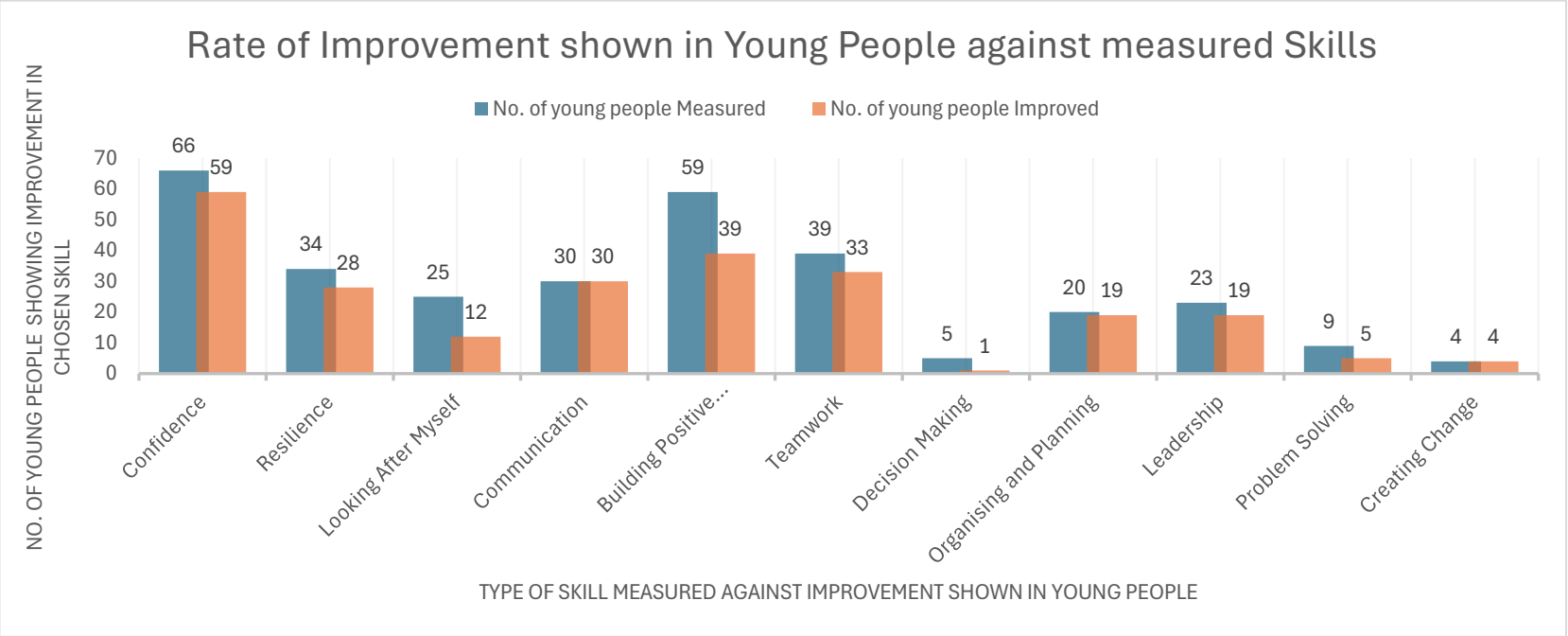
Young people have also handed over a HYP Time capsule which will be housed by the High Life Highland's Archive Centre and opened in 2050. Items in the time capsule include objects young people feel represent their areas as well as their messages to future Highland young people.

How to speak to young people guidance and film clips – were developed by Highland Youth Convener and the HYP Exec Committee this year. Leah supporting filming of young people giving their tips on how to speak to young people at the HYP conference.

Learners feel more able to affect positive change in their life	**YouthLink Scotland National Youth Work Outcomes & Skills Framework Pilot Report** During the 2025–26 academic year, The Highland Council Youth Service piloted the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework (YWO&SF) as a tool for measuring the impact of youth work on young people. The pilot had three primary aims: 1. To familiarise Youth Development Officers (YDOs) with the framework. 2. To assess its suitability as a service-wide impact measurement tool. 3. To understand the workload implications of its implementation.  Youth Development Officers (YDOs) in the **29 Associated School Groups (**ASGs) were asked to apply the framework within one project and measure change for a small group of young people. Evidence was gathered through a range of sources, including young people themselves, parents and carers, teachers, partner agencies, practitioner observations, and examples of young people's work. This approach aimed to provide a balanced and credible assessment of change over time. **79 young people** were involved in the pilot and demonstrated that the framework is an effective tool for evidencing the impact of youth work, with positive outcomes recorded across a range of skills. The framework proved particularly effective in capturing personal and social development that can be difficult to evidence through traditional monitoring approaches. Most YDOs are now familiar with the Skills Framework and can confidently discuss it. The Highland Council Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd **Lessons learned and Recommendations** 1. **Evidence collection** can skew results as the young people decide which skills they want to focus on, and not all young people chose the same skills to be measured, creating less opportunity to evidence measurement in 'Organising and planning' and 'Creating Change' skills, while measurement in 'Communication' is evidenced across 100% of work 2. **Standardisation is essential** - The pilot demonstrated that structured evidence collection methods produced higher-quality and more consistent, usable data. Where recording templates were used, both evidence gathering and subsequent analysis were more efficient. 3. **Small sample sizes produce better results -** Attempts to monitor larger groups created an unsustainable workload and reduced the quality of observations. Limiting participation to small cohorts of under 10 young people provides a more realistic and sustainable approach. 4. **Impact of change must be evidenced rather than achievement** – Clearer guidance, ongoing training and quality assurance is required to ensure a consistent understanding of impact to measure change instead of recording achievements.

5. **Partner involvement adds value** - Involving partners and schools in the evaluation planning process improves their understanding of youth work approaches, improves the quality of evaluation data and strengthens collaborative working.
6. **Existing systems should be utilised** – Avoid the use of separate recording systems which risk duplication of work. Seek integration within existing service management systems to minimise administrative burden and support sustainable long-term use.

Overall, the YW&SO Framework pilot demonstrated that it has significant potential as a service-wide impact measurement tool. While further training, standardisation, and system integration will be required, the framework provides a method of evidencing the difference youth work makes in the lives of young people. A phased implementation approach over the coming years would enable the service to embed outcome-focused practice and strengthen its ability to demonstrate impact to stakeholders, partners, and funders.



Graph 1.1 Rate of Improvement shown in young people against measured skills

"I liked my sessions with my youth worker because there is not a big class there, it was smaller. I think it has helped me see that I can still be successful even if things go wrong." (Young person)

"He is benefiting greatly in his confidence & socialising as he has made some firm friends that share the same interests in being fit and healthy." (Parent)

The Growing2gether Evaluation Report September 2025 – July 2026

Growing2gether is a nursery mentoring programme for young people where the time spent mentoring children counts as work experience. The programme is over a 16-week period earning young people an SCQF Level 4 qualification. It offers trauma-informed training, enabling vulnerable young people to mentor nursery children who need extra emotional support.

Grounded in positive psychology and transpersonal psychology the programme combines evidence-based strategies to build resilience and well-being with a holistic approach that supports young people in developing a deeper sense of identity, purpose, and potential. The programme aims to enhance emotional wellbeing, self-worth, and relational intelligence for both mentors and children.

- Growing2gether Evaluation Report 2025-26
- Young persons Youth Social Action (YSA) recruitment video
- Early Years Mentoring recruitment video

Programme Experience

- ✓ 94% of young people agreed that they enjoyed working with others.
- ✓ 93% agreed that they enjoyed building a relationship with their toddler.
- ✓ 83% agreed that they found the group sessions valuable and informative.
- ✓ 93% agreed that they would recommend Growing2gether to others.

Personal Growth and Well-being

- ✓ 84% agreed that the programme helped them become more aware of themselves and the
- ✓ consequences of their actions.
- ✓ 88% agreed that they valued the support they received during the sessions.
- ✓ 79% agreed that the programme helped them gain confidence in their abilities.

Relationships and Community

- ✓ 78% agreed that the experience made them feel more connected to others.
- ✓ 83% agreed that the programme helped them understand others better.
- ✓ 72% agreed that the programme encouraged them to become more involved in their community and help others.
- ✓

Future Aspirations and Positive Choices

- ✓ 93% agreed that education provides more opportunities in the future.
- ✓ 69% agreed that the programme helped them reflect on what they are good at and what is
- ✓ important in their lives.
- ✓ 73% agreed that the programme helped them see that they have the potential to reach their goals.
- ✓ 73% agreed that the programme is influential in helping young people make positive lifestyle decisions, such as staying away from alcohol and drugs



The findings from the evaluation demonstrate that the Growing2gether intervention has a positive and meaningful impact on the emotional well-being, confidence, school engagement and personal development of participating young people.

The results demonstrated statistically significant improvements in mental well-being, alongside significant reductions in symptoms of anxiety and depression. Please see the video of the interview from the Youth Social Action Group)

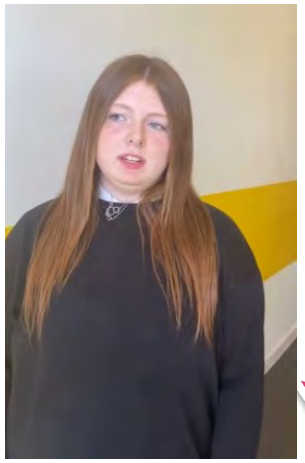
Results:

- ✓ **Wellbeing improved by 14%**
- ✓ **Anxiety and depression symptoms reduced by 18%** with medium effect sizes, suggesting that these changes were not only statistically significant but also clinically meaningful.
- ✓ Young people consistently describing feeling **happier, less stressed**, **more excited** to attend school and more optimistic
- ✓ Teachers similarly observed **improvements in mood**, while **parents** reported seeing **happier** and more emotionally settled young people at home.

The consistency of these perspectives suggests that the intervention is supporting emotional health across different settings rather than solely within the programme itself.

- ✓ **Growth mindset** scores increased significantly, indicating that participants became more likely to believe in their ability to develop through effort and learning.
- ✓ Alongside this, teachers reported the largest improvements in young people's **confidence to attempt new tasks**, with **self-efficacy** increasing by almost 50%.
- ✓ **Confidence** emerged as one of the **strongest qualitative themes**, with many participants describing **reduced anxiety**, **increased willingness to participate** in class and greater belief in themselves. Such findings suggest that the intervention not only improves current well-being but may also strengthen protective factors that enable young people to **cope more effectively with future challenges**.

- ✓ A notable strength of Growing2gether is its emphasis on **meaningful relationships**. Young people repeatedly described developing **genuine emotional connections** with the younger children they supported, often experiencing feelings of **trust**, **responsibility** and **care** that were highly rewarding.



Qualitative feedback further illustrated that participation encouraged school attendance, with several young people explaining that they attended school specifically because they looked forward to visiting the nursery and participating in the programme. Increased attendance, combined with improved classroom confidence and engagement, suggests that Growing2gether may have wider educational benefits beyond its primary focus on emotional health. Gavin Morgan, Growing2Gether interviews young people: Growing2gether Youth Voices

"It's made me feel more confident about myself and made me feel better about me"

"Before the programme I didn't want to go into school, I didn't like all the long days and stuff....now I'm better with kids and I've seen how they act and do stuff"



Safe Strong & Free - Rights & Respect Programme

Safe Strong & Free is one of the Planet Youth delivery partners involved in taking forward the collaborative approach to health improvement in young people with 13 partners. Safe Strong & Free educate young people that every young person has the Right to feel Free. Their new pilot as part of their Rights & Respect programme, supports young people to explore healthy relationships, equality, respect and the pressures they can face growing up. The pilot will include tailored sessions for girls and boys, creating space for honest, age-appropriate conversations.



- ✓ **For girls**, sessions will explore confidence, self-respect, healthy relationships, boundaries, equality and the messages girls and young women can receive about how they should look, behave or be treated.
- ✓ **For boys**, sessions will focus on respect for girls and women, positive male role models, healthy masculinity, misogyny, peer pressure and the influence of online content and influencers.

The overall message is the same for everyone: respect, equality, healthy relationships and challenging harmful attitudes and behaviours. They will be working with schools, clubs and community groups interested in helping shape the pilot.

HUG Action for Mental Health – Caithness Experience Matters Advisory Panel (ExMAP)

The Caithness Experience Matters Advisory Panel (ExMAP) brings together people with lived and living experience, unpaid carers, community organisations and services to help shape positive change in Caithness. Their Learning Matters Progress & Learning Report shares what participants said, what has been learned and the actions people want to take forward.

Feedback is welcomed from ExMAP participants, third-sector organisations, statutory service, Community Partnership or District Planning Partnership partners by reading the report and completing the short impact poll to help understand how the report may influence understanding, planning, partnership working and future action. Complete the quick impact poll (2 minutes): https://bit.ly/ImpactPollLearningMattersPLReport to ensure that that lived and living experience continues to shape decisions and positive change in Caithness.





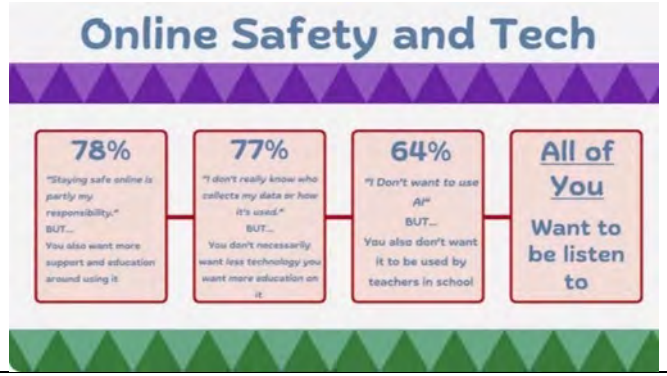
CLD Priority 3: Digital Inclusion

Outcome: CLD learners experience increased inclusion in digital life

CLD in Practice – spotlight on Digital Inclusion

Online Safety and Technology Highland Youth Convener Focus 2025-26, by Leah McBain

The Highland Youth Convenor 2025-26, Leah McBean, has authored a research project on **Online Safety and Technology.** The project is not to demonise or promote technology, but to create opportunities for young people to shape the policies that affect their relationship with it. The report covers key areas of Responsibility, Usage, Risks, Broadband & Digital Access, AI & Algorithms, Cyberbullying & Online Misuse and Privacy & Data Tracking.





"The young people involved in this research are already exercising agency. They are making choices about what they share, who they speak to, what platforms they use, how much time they spend online and whether they seek help. The purpose of this report is not to suggest that young people should have no responsibility for those choices Responsibility needs to exist alongside support, education, infrastructure and accountability." Leah McBean

Methods of Engagement

- **School & Youth Group visits** speaking directly with young people about their concerns and supports
- **Youth-led focus groups & surveys**: creating a manifesto of what changes young people want to see
- **Social media engagement**: using Highland Youth Convener social media platforms to model positive social media use and promote events for young people in the Highlands
- **Feedback loops**: ensuring young people are part of the process at every stage
- **Youth decision-making**: allowing young people to shape how technology and online safety should be approached, closing the gap between lived experience and current policy
- **Related groups and organisations**: Working in collaboration with groups and organisations focused on young people people's lives and wellbeing to ensure those implementing policy have a connection to its implementation



Online Safety and Technology Survey Questions with 3,240 responses

Survey Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total responses
It's up to me to keep myself safe online	75	124	33	12	10	254
The adults in my life do enough to protect me online	62	111	54	17	10	254
I spend the majority of my time on some form of technology	105	48	51	33	17	254
Phones are a bigger distraction than they are a benefit	39	67	76	22	51	255
I have spoken to people online, some of whom I would consider friends	97	40	34	36	48	255
I have relatively good access to a phone signal or internet whenever and wherever I need	66	65	42	44	28	245
Teachers, bosses or adults who give me responsibilities forget that not everyone has reliable Wi-Fi or access to technology at home	72	64	66	14	29	245

I'd rather use AI than a search engine to look for things	33	24	32	52	104	245
Apps (social media, YouTube, etc.) decide what I see more than I do	55	50	78	31	34	248
I'm more concerned about bullying and harassment online than I am in person	39	41	79	44	44	247
A lot of what goes online is wrong, but it's not my place to speak up if I am not involved	40	47	92	45	22	246
My online accounts (social media, gaming, chats) have my personal information visible to anyone that looks (name, age, location, etc.)	33	47	73	39	54	246
I don't really know who collects my data and how it's used	110	79	37	13	7	246
TOTAL (All Statements)	**826**	**807**	**747**	**402**	**458**	**3,240**

A copy of Leah's Online Safety and Technology Summary and Detailed Reports are attached below and will be uploaded to the Library of Voices soon

Online Safety and Technology detailed r

Highland Online Safety Summary findi

Measures of impact	Evidence of impact	BRAG
Learners have increased digital skills	**Adult Learning Digital Skills classes** Adult Learning provides free digital skills sessions aimed at supporting people to become more confident in using a computer, smartphone or tablet so they can carry out all these day-to-day tasks with ease. The sessions are suitable for adults of all ages and they run all year round, which gives people a real chance to progress and feel positive about their online interactions. They cover basic computer skills, video calls and keeping safe online as well as individual problems people might be having with their own devices and can be used in a practical setting for online banking and shopping, to making a GP appointment and doing a job application.	

Highland Council Adult Learning Digital Inclusion Data 2025-26

- ✓ **39** learners engaged with digital skills activities.
- ✓ **16** adult learners participated in learning using THC Adult Learning's digital learning platform.
- ✓ **7** ESOL learners in remote-rural areas of Highland regularly accessed ESOL classes online.
- ✓ **35** parents engaged with learning focusing on reducing digital harm.
- ✓ **12** adult learners received a digital device enabling them access to online digital tools.
- ✓ **26** learners accessed learning support for improved understanding of DWP's Universal Credit digital platform.

Mhor Collective

Mhor Collective is a single-issue organisation focused on minimising the impact of digital inequality through relational, community-driven grassroots work. Currently their Digital Champions are focused on supporting refugees and asylum seekers, women and girls that are victims of violence, supporting people who are using drugs (harm reduction), supporting people with experience of justice system, supporting people at risk of (or experiencing) homelessness, supporting young people around sexual health and wellbeing (digital inclusion focus also).



Mhor Collective is an official National Databank Provider, so the group functions as a digital inclusion hub, providing free mobile SIM cards and data to individuals experiencing data poverty

Connecting to Care is a year-long initiative delivered in partnership with Discovery College in Inverness, offering trauma-informed, peer-led drop-in digital support focused on mental health recovery and rural isolation in the Highlands.
David Bryan -'developing the social soil' for wider initiatives to grow and flourish

Digital inclusion

HTSI has collaborated with 26 organisations as part of its work to map Highland's digital inclusion ecosystem. These include digital inclusion providers, community organisations and public services. Initial conversations described barriers that rarely arise as a single issue. The cost of devices and data, poor connectivity and accessibility needs may sit alongside a need for help with skills, confidence or online safety. Many have, therefore, highlighted a need for joined-up, sustained support that responds to each person's circumstances. Organisations also raised concerns about how people who cannot or choose not to use digital routes access services as more of them move online.

Organisations described valuable work already taking place, both through dedicated digital support and as part of wider services. Several have also raised concerns about limited capacity, short-term funding and unclear routes to continued support. The closure of Red Chair Highland was highlighted as a significant concern, with the loss of its digital learning, device provision, one-to-one support and referral route for many learners. HTSI plans to gather further evidence through surveys and develop an ecosystem map. This will help build a fuller picture of how organisations and services connect, how people reach support and where gaps may remain.

Lairg & District Learning Centre

Thanks to an £18,000 Digital Inclusion grant from Scottish Government Connecting Scotland, Lairg & District Learning Centre are running the **Connecting Communities Digital Inclusion project** which aims to help up to 200 people feel more confident and less stressed in an increasingly online world. Practical tools that make life easier include online banking, online shopping and digital library services. LDLC has also received grants from The Highland Council and Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI) in 2026 to focus on the use of apps such as Google Lens, Merlin Bird Recognition, Banking, and Games for older and young people.

The IT/Digital Tutor provides support, answers questions and helps people with their devices in informal workshops to troubleshoot technology over tea and biscuits. The free sessions provide a supportive environment to bridge the digital gap and don't just fix things, they show you how they work. Sessions take place in Invershin Hall, Lairg Community Centre, Kyle Centre (Tongue), Forse, Seaboard Centre (Balintore), Rogart Mart, Dornoch Hub, Brora Heritage Centre, Ardgay Hall and Rosehall Hall. Pictured are the older men's group and the Kids Club coding sessions.



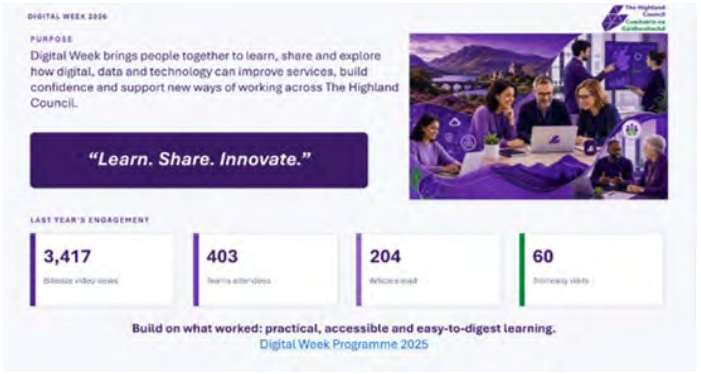


International Day of Peace

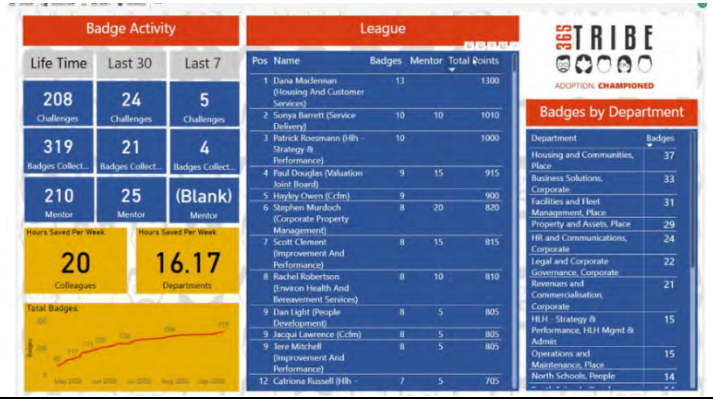
Learner R. has the confidence to share his new digital skills to celebrate the International Day of Peace. He was encouraged by the Adult Learning Coordinator to use time in his Digital Skills and Literacy classes to make a presentation about the Day and that Adult Learning will organise a celebration with him. R made a power point presentation and Adult Learning staff invited a selection of learners, staff and partners to come along on 23 September for a small celebration. R shared his presentation to start with. Local Councillor Michael Gregson attended at R's request and was a great encouragement. Tea, coffee and cakes were shared. The presentation was followed by a "Conversation Café" style chat around the table with prompts about Peace and then a craft of making paper doves with Peace messages to hang as decoration. We ended the time together by looking at some vocabulary from

	John Lennon's song Imagine and then singing along to the music video with lyrics. R has already shared ideas with his tutor of how we can celebrate the day again next year.   	
Learners have increased participation in digital life	**People: Digital Skills and Workforce Planning - The Highland Council Digital Champions** The Highland Council launched a Digital Champions Community Programme as part of its Digital Strategy to support and enable Council staff through training, upskilling, and peer learning to build an internal digital culture upskill staff and support internal digital transformation. It aligns to the A changing nation: how Scotland will thrive in a digital world and is tied to the Council's broader organisational development and workforce plans to become a Digital Office, ensuring self-serve materials and accessible digital support networks. The Tribe365 sessions also build on peer Council models, such as Aberdeen City Council supported by Microsoft, where champions share knowledge via structured routines and role-modelling. Digital Office for Scottish Local Government - Highland Councils Digital Maturity Assessment, 2022 states, "Digital transformation is 80% about the people and ways of working and 20% about the technology." Key Objectives of Digital Champions: • Provide essential skills training to establish a robust internal network. • Act as a foundation for digital inclusion and service planning. • Foster innovation, motivation, and staff productivity by sharing best practices for new digital technologies	

The Programme of learning in year 1 helps staff to skip through badges. Popular TrainEasy sessions have been released in bite-sized chunks by cropping the webinars and How-to-Guides bring efficiencies to the team. The peer Network 365 Tribe encourages staff to join sessions/webinars and invite colleagues. Some of the CLD staff have taken part in Excel and Co-Pilot sessions. Even learning one or two things has been worth sharing with colleagues. Digital Office includes the digital strategy 2027, leading change with Co-pilot chat and Microsoft tools. At the Digital Champions Check-In & Digital Week 2026 session with Kerry Duff, we heard feedback and celebrated the contributions that staff continue to make across the Council, with a live poll to contribute comments.



Digital Week 2026 takes place from 2nd-6th November and Digital Champions have been invited to get involved. Opportunities include delivering a session, creating a short video, writing an article or blog, sharing a success story, or helping with event planning and support. An upcoming session on PowerBI is on the cards next for the 365Tribe Champions Community. During the **365Tribe Peer Networking** session, Kerry Duff said, "in the lead up to Digital Week 2026 in November there will be comms going out twice a week." The Mentor Community has spaces available to join for digital skills sessions where you can learn new technical skills. They need volunteers who can design campaign images and written content in the lead up to Digital week. Weekly planning session on Wednesdays provides event running, technical support, and hosting. To celebrate the success of digital champions they have the 'League Board 365 Tribe' and want people to actively show their teams how to support others to learn.

	Guidance has been shared on how to make the most of the 365Tribe Champions Community, including following the learning pathway 01-2.6 in the Teams Community, watching the welcome webinar, and ensuring all Teams channels are visible. There is no pressure to complete everything at once and staff can learn asynchronously at a pace that works for them.  "Find a Digital Champion" page helps colleagues to connect with local Digital Champions for support and advice. Kerry from the Digital team thanked staff for their enthusiasm, commitment and willingness to help colleagues build digital confidence. ***"A network is only as strong as its people, and thanks to our Digital Champions, this community is making a real difference across Highland Council every day."*** *Kerry Duff, Digital Development Lead, Highland Council*	



CLD Priority 4: Employability, Volunteering and Training

Outcome: CLD Learners progress towards and into economic independence where appropriate

CLD in practice – spotlight on Employability, volunteering and training

New Start Highland Training and Reuse Village

In 2025, New Start Highland celebrated its 25th year with the opening of Scotland's first Training and Reuse Village. The social investment in the project has transformed the Carsegate site in Inverness into a vibrant hub featuring the Yard Café, training kitchen, tool library and a new bike repair hut, alongside their retail outlets. They strive to foster a cultural shift from disposability to ethical reuse which is core to their mission, diverting 10,000 tonnes of furniture from landfill since their inception in 2000 and now support 1,500 individuals and families annually who are facing crisis including poverty, housing insecurity, social inequality and long-term unemployment. They have recently developed their Highland Foodbank space at Glebe Street into a Foodbank Plus Service to offer more than emergency food parcels to enable access to wider services helping those facing crisis, providing a safe space to meet, have a cup of tea and a chat, and collect clothes and furniture that make a house into a home. None of this would be possible without the incredible volunteers who give up their time to sort and pack donations, work in the warehouse, listen to people and offer compassionate support.

Skills and Employability pathways to support people out of poverty

CEO of New Start Highland and Highland Poverty and Equality Commissioner, James Dunbar, drives meaningful impact to reduce poverty by working in partnership with the Highland Employability Partnership (HEP) under the umbrella of *Work. Life. Highland*. through the No One Left Behind (NOLB) employability system in partnership with The Highland Council, DWP DYP, NHS, SDS, HIE, HTSI and UHI and through the 'All in Highlands' employment partnership model launched in January 2026 and developed with statutory and third sector partners including Enable Works and Barnardo's Works. New Start Highland's approach to working with partners helps to support priority family groups out of poverty and the CEO's dedication to their mission was recently recognised by winning the coveted accolade for Outstanding Contribution to the Local Economy. With more than 1 in 5 children (22%) in Highland living in poverty (NHS Highland 2025), New Start Highland has helped over 800 people into employment in the past year alone, enabling new starts for people into meaningful jobs, including those who face barriers to employment, people with disabilities or health conditions, and helping people of all ages to gain confidence, work skills and qualifications leading to more sustainable and fair work.

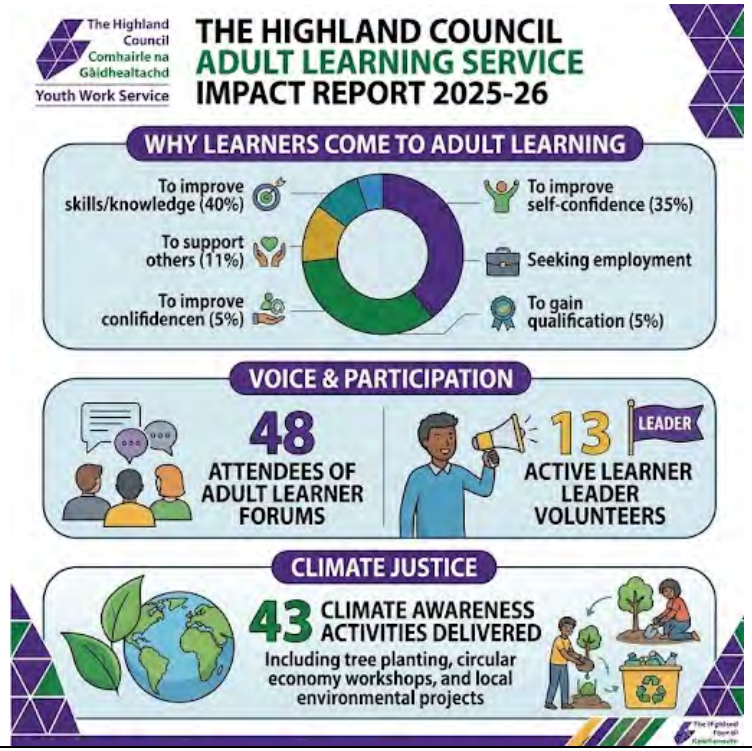


Working in partnership to reduce poverty and inequality

New Start Highland has recently welcomed multi-award-winning circular economy social enterprise, ILM Highland (Alness), to the Training and Reuse Village, to provide households across Inverness with access to affordable electrical appliances such as washing machines and cookers while tackling one of the fastest-growing waste streams in their programme aimed at rescuing, repairing, and sharing. Calman Trust has also joined New Start Highland to support young people aged 14-25 who are at risk of being left behind and face personal challenges. Calman equip young people with practical learning and individual support to develop the skills and understanding they need to manage independent living, in readiness for employment, and the offer the tools to sustain this.

Measures of impact	Evidence of impact	BRAG
Learners have gained a recognised qualification / award	**The Highland Council Adult Learning Service Impact Report 2025-26** Adult Learners who engage with the Adult Learning service report an increase in confidence, improved health and wellbeing and a reduction in feelings of social isolation and loneliness. Improved digital skills enables people to access services, benefits, healthcare, learning, employment opportunities and social connections, reducing exclusion and inequality. The Highland Council has 11 FTE Adult Learning practitioners who work with Adult Learners from 44 different nationalities, 13 Learning Leaders and 48 attend Forums. ✓ 87% of learners achieved 1 or more goals within their learning plan cycle ✓ 90% of learner reported improved self-confidence within their learning plan cycle ✓ 33,114 learning hours delivered **Why learners come to Adult Learning**: ✓ 40% to improve their skills and knowledge ✓ 35% to improve their self-confidence ✓ 11% to support others ✓ 9% because they are seeking employment ✓ 5% to gain a qualification 39 learners engaged with **digital skills activities** 16 adult learners participated using the digital learning platform 7 ESOL learners accessed ESOL classes online from remote-rural areas 35 parents engaged with learning focusing on reducing digital harm 12 received a digital device enabling them access to online digital tools 26 accessed support to better understand DWP's UC digital platform	


The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd
Youth Work Service
THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
ADULT LEARNING SERVICE
IMPACT REPORT 2025-26
OVERVIEW & ACHIEVEMENT
11
FTE ADULT LEARNING PRACTITIONERS
33,114
LEARNING HOURS DELIVERED
87%
ACHIEVED 1+ LEARNING GOALS
90%
REPORTED IMPROVED CONFIDENCE
WORK WITH 44 NATIONALITIES
DIGITAL INCLUSION DATA
39
Learners engaged with digital skills activities
16
Used digital learning platform
7
Remote-rural ESOL accessed classes online
35
Parents reduced digital harm
12
Received digital devices
26
Learnt Universal platform
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
10
CANDIDATES COMPLETED PDA Adult Learning Intro
15
CANDIDATES COMPLETED PDA Intro to Tutoring ESL (Unit 1)
U1
U2
3
progressed to Unit 2


The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd
Youth Work Service
THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
ADULT LEARNING SERVICE
IMPACT REPORT 2025-26
WHY LEARNERS COME TO ADULT LEARNING
To improve skills/knowledge (40%)
To improve self-confidence (35%)
To support others (11%)
Seeking employment
To improve conlifidencen (5%)
To gain qualification (5%)
VOICE & PARTICIPATION
48
ATTENDEES OF ADULT LEARNER FORUMS
13
LEADER
ACTIVE LEARNER LEADER VOLUNTEERS
CLIMATE JUSTICE
43
CLIMATE AWARENESS ACTIVITIES DELIVERED
Including tree planting, circular economy workshops, and local environmental projects

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL YOUTH WORK SERVICE

YOUTH AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENT IMPACT 2025-26

1 April 2025 - 31 March 2026

The Highland Council Youth Work Service is pleased to celebrate the success of young people through the achievement of recognised awards, new skills and youth work opportunities in 2025-26 which are featured in case studies throughout this report.

Youth Awards & Achievement Impact 2025-26

- ✓ **748 Awards, Qualifications and Achievements**
- ✓ **Key Youth Awards –** 111 Dynamic Youth Awards, 33 Hi5 Awards, 17 Bronze Youth Achievement Awards and 5 Silver Achievement Awards
- ✓ **Saltire Awards** – 324 Saltire Awards build confidence, teamwork and resilience
- ✓ **Skills for Life** – 137 Resilience for Life Awards & 38 Level 9 awards recognising significant achievement
- ✓ **Additional qualifications achieved**
- ✓ **Top 6 ASGs out of 29** for Awards

Young people across Highland have gained confidence, resilience, leadership skills, life skills, improved health & wellbeing and post-school positive destinations through being involved in youth work.

The Voluntary Youth Network in Highland also celebrates the achievements of young people in community-based youth work with examples of their impact evidenced throughout this report in case studies, stats and stories.

The Highland Youth Work Delivery Group in the CLD governance is responding positively to actions from the HMIE progress visit with CLD/E partners working effectively across the local authority, third sector and other public bodies to plan and deliver Youth Work and Employability services in Highland. Evidence of this is seen in improved partnership working, workforce development and shared decision-making.



The Highland Council Learning for Life Qualification Scotland Centre

The Highland Council Learning for Life Qualification Scotland Centre has provided active support to community learners and staff throughout the year with an increase in Awards delivery and partnership working. Highlights for the Certified Awards/Units and the Open entries for 2025-26 are in broad categories for Youth Work, ICT, ESOL & Adult Literacies and Personal Development & Employment.

Certified Awards

- ✓ 68 Individual learners
- ✓ 29 different Certified Awards or Units
- ✓ 4 Levels

Of the 29 Certified Awards or Units the 10 most popular are:

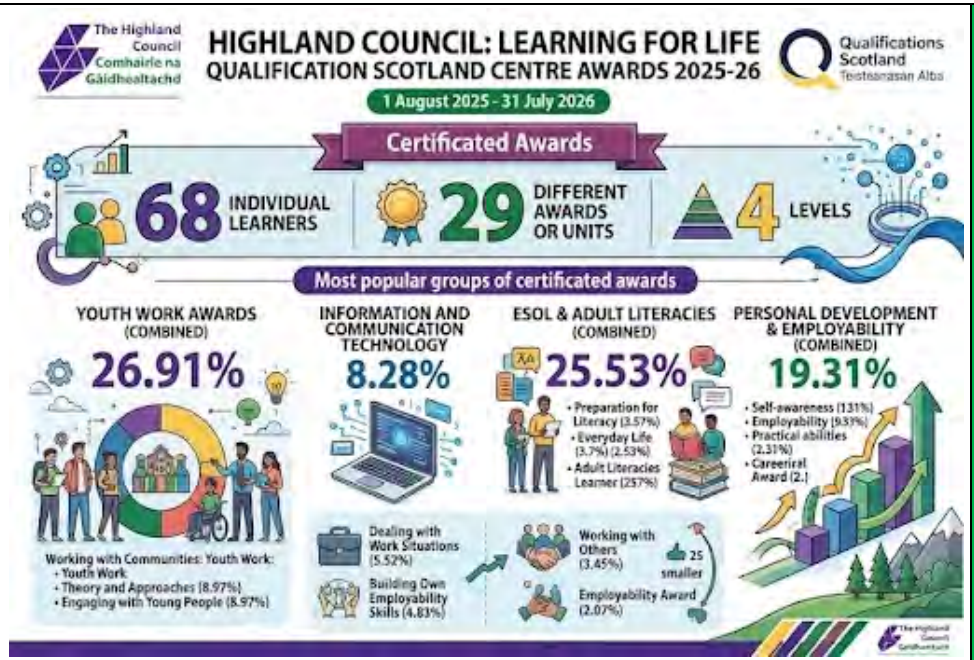
- ✓ Working with Communities: Youth Work
- ✓ Theory and Approaches to Youth Work
- ✓ Youth Work: Engaging with Young People
- ✓ Information and Communication Technology
- ✓ ESOL: Preparation for Literacy
- ✓ Dealing with Work Situations
- ✓ Responsibilities of Employment
- ✓ Personal Development: Self Awareness
- ✓ Building Own Employability Skills
- ✓ ESOL for Everyday Life: Listening and Speaking

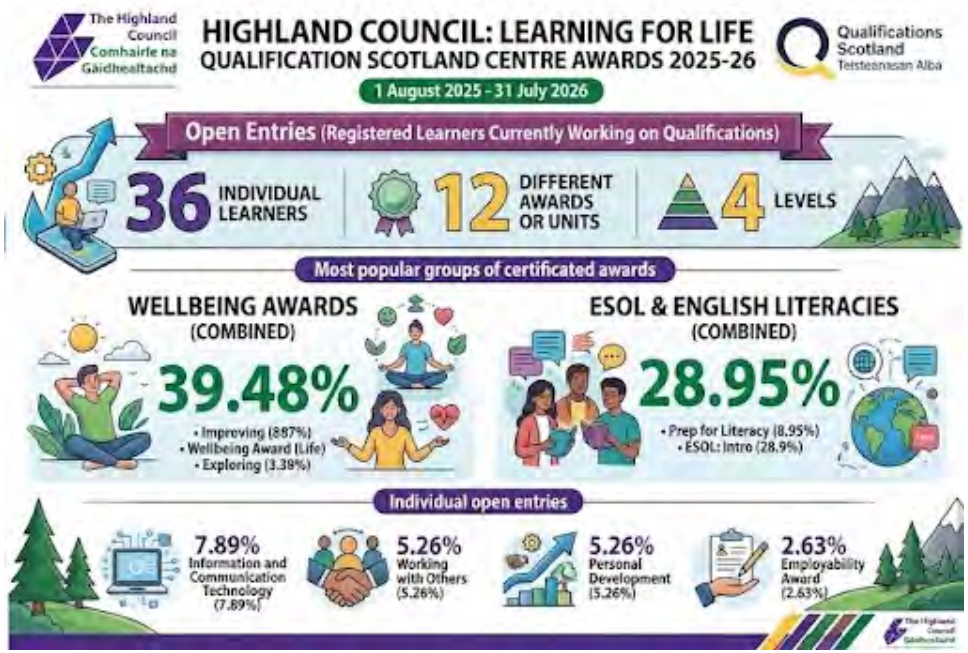
Open entries (work-in-progress on award)

- ✓ 36 individual learners
- ✓ 12 different Awards or Units
- ✓ 4 Levels

Of the 12 Open Entries, the 5 most popular are:

- ✓ ESOL: Preparation for Literacy
- ✓ Improving Wellbeing
- ✓ Wellbeing Award
- ✓ ESOL: An Intro to Beginner English Literacies
- ✓ Exploring Wellbeing





	Highland Council Youth Service: Youth Scotland Awards As part of the Highland Council Youth Service, Youth Scotland Awards accredit wider achievement through non-formal activities that young people have engaged in at school, youth work or at home, and align with the Youth Skills and Outcomes framework. The Awards Network advocates parity of wider achievement awards in general with formal qualification, demonstrating and developing skills for employability that align with the Curriculum for Excellence. Engagement in awards is measured by HMIE as outcome in HGIYS, and forms part of the Scottish Government Attainment Gap strategy. Examples of Youth Scotland Award attainment across Highland include Dynamic Youth Awards (DYAs) for participation in a Youth Services Growing Together project, Silver Youth Achievement Awards (YAAs) for young people's involvement in organising P7 transition activities and Hi5s for young people taking part in Youth Services cookery projects. There are projects which have community links and have allowed young people to direct their own learning goals and have reflected on their achievements. Highland Council Youth Work Service: Youth Scotland Awards Annual Report 2025-26 In 2025-26 Youth Scotland awards were quantified and formed part of Youth Development Officer (YDO) Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). From August 2026, these measures have been removed with focus on qualitative targeting awards and resource at those who stand to benefit the most from meaningful awards (e.g. young people from SIMD areas). This also recognises a diversity of award delivery contexts, and readiness of young people to undertake awards. In support of this direction, it's worth noting that CLDMS no longer measure award KPIs. **HTSI Volunteer Academy and the State of Volunteering in Highland**	

At the launch of the HTSI Volunteer Academy in May 2025, volunteer trends were explored across the region with a current estimate of 20,282 volunteers in Highland. In Badenoch and Strathspey, the majority of volunteers are casual with 69 roles per 1,000 population (around 72%). Skye has 49 per 1,000, Ross-shire has 48 per 1,000 and Lochaber has 46 per 1,000. Highland has a higher-than-average number of volunteers than the rest of Scotland, with the growth rate in Highland at 13.9%, mostly the older population. There is a decline in rural areas due to limited access to transport, digital infrastructure and increased migration to urban areas. There is a reduction in youth volunteering, however, our approach to volunteer recruitment has not changed since the 1950s and we have not shaped our ask of citizens that is fit for the 21st century life.

The Volunteer Academy is not a physical structure; it is a movement, a concept of how we reframe support for volunteering. We need to stabilise volunteers to stop the flood as we have the biggest workforce crisis. What are we going to do about this? HTSI proposes a test for change:

VOLUNTEER ACADEMY
Highland Third Sector Interface

Volunteer Academy – what does it do?

The HTSI Volunteer Academy helps people across Highland develop routes into volunteering and supports organisations to create and manage volunteering opportunities. It offers advice, learning and practical tools for both volunteers and Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs).

Developing routes into volunteering

The Volunteer Academy shares opportunities and helps people explore roles suited to their interests and circumstances. Its supported volunteering referral route helps identify people who may need additional support to get involved. **98 opportunities are currently available** with examples for volunteers at the Highland Foodbank, MCR Pathways Mentor, Calman Trust van driver, New Start Highland warehouse assistant, Caithness Pride events, Cadet Forces, ILM Repair Café, Befriending and Home Start family support.

Volunteer spotlight - The Skills Bank offers a flexible way for people to contribute a particular skill to a time-limited project. For example, **Dornoch Firth Group** community group in Sutherland found a volunteer bagpiper for its Tuesday Tots parent and toddler group celebration on Burns Night. The Volunteer Academy also brokers employer supported volunteering projects. This has involved organisations such as Balfour Beatty and Morrisons, alongside statutory bodies. Through careers fairs, Saltire Awards, and the Youth and Philanthropy Initiative, the Volunteer Academy works with schools across Highland to recognise young people's volunteering contributions and help them learn about local causes and opportunities.



Volunteer Quest is a pilot in Caithness and Sutherland that uses creative workshops and conversations to hear young people's views on volunteering: what interests them, what gets in the way and what opportunities would fit their lives. The Volunteer Academy will disseminate this learning to volunteer involved organisations to inform the designing of future opportunities and how we communicate with young people about volunteering.

Learning for Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs)

The Volunteer Academy provides guidance, templates, individual advice, forums and regular training for Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs). Topics include volunteer management, trustee responsibilities and risk management, with further sessions shaped by organisations' needs. Local forums and quarterly online Volunteer Managers Forums allow organisations to exchange experience and develop their practice.

Intergenerational volunteering has been a focus of this learning. A forum with input from Generations Working Together explored approaches to involving different generations. Volunteer Academy staff have also attended its network meetings and practitioner training to inform future activity.

The **Volunteer Academy's Fellowship Programme** supports people working or volunteering in Highland's third sector to undertake learning visits and research beyond the region. Fellows bring back ideas that can strengthen local volunteering practice and share their learning through published reports and the Volunteer Academy's lecture series. The lecture series also draws on other expertise. For example, a *Volunteering for Conservation* lecture at UHI Inverness featured staff from the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland discussing how they recognise, support and develop volunteers. Workshops, such as our recent session on Canva and Linked In run by United Infrastructure, provide further opportunities for learning. As a Volunteer Charter Champion, the Volunteer Academy also works alongside national bodies, including Volunteer Scotland, and contributes to volunteering frameworks, policies and guidance.





Recognising and sharing volunteers' contributions

Volunteer spotlights shared throughout the year have highlighted the contributions people make through their own organisations. During Volunteers' Week, the Volunteer Academy held a celebration at Davochfin Farm, Inverness where volunteers from local charities met, shared experiences and were thanked for their work.

The **Pre-Loved Four Seasons Charity Fashion Show** brought together eight charity shops, local designers and volunteer models to celebrate reuse and the people behind charity retail. Pre-Loved Charity Fashion Show was full of colour, creativity and community spirit. Volunteer models took to the runway wearing outfits styled from local charity shop finds, with local designers helping to bring each look to life. The event was a brilliant way to celebrate reuse, creativity and the hidden gems found in our charity shops, while also recognising the volunteers and teams who help make these spaces so valuable to their communities.



Wester Loch Ewe Trust, styled by Heidi.
For many years, well-known Highland designer, Heidi Soos, has upcycled clothes in a style that leans towards bohemian influence, asymmetrical lines, rich colours and natural fibres. Her unique recycled designs sell online and at the Old Schoolhouse, Wester Loch Ewe Trust - a rural charity bringing people together through connection, skills, wellbeing & shared community life.



Caberfeidh Horizons, styled by Ashlia.
Caberfeidh Horizons in Kingussie creates opportunities for adults and young people with disabilities to be part of their local community through training, inclusion, independence and life skills development. Ashlia's styling brought a sense of occasion and sustainability to the catwalk.

The Volunteer Academy is beginning a soft launch of its Volunteering App. Designed to make it easier for people to discover opportunities and for organisations to connect with and support volunteers, the app will offer another route into volunteering across Highland.

Street Scene Inverness

Operation Respect Street Scene is a partnership initiative focused on providing a positive experience for young people in Inverness city centre, offering welcoming and engaging opportunities on Friday afternoons. This youth-focused initiative provides a mix of sporting activities, games, food, crafts and information stands, alongside pre-organised sessions designed to encourage participation and connection. The aim is to create safe, supportive and positive spaces within the city centre including Falcon Square, Scran Kitchen and Ember Kafe, allowing young people to move between spaces and take part in different activities throughout the afternoon enjoying a meal, taking part in activities and engaging with a range of services and support.

Senior Community Safety Coordinator, Owen McManus, from Inverness BID Street Scene reports that funding applications have been successful this year with major cash injections from High Life Highland, Inverness Common Good Fund and Police Scotland, and donations from local companies. Without the help of all the partners and major donations in-kind, such as the Eastgate Centre space, resources and practical expertise, Street Scene would not be possible. To ensure the sustainability of Street Scene due to space limitations and increased funding, Street Scene will look different in 2026 with one event per month starting on Friday 30th October for



	Halloween in the Eastgate Centre, 27th November in An Seomar and the Christmas-themed event will be in Sound Bar. Further monthly events will follow in January to June 2027 https://www.facebook.com/reel/4387910131448946 **Youth Highland Adventurers Guild - Tabletop Roleplaying Games** Youth Highland youth clubs based in Dingwall, Thurso and the Buzz Project in Fort William have been game designing with Tabletop Roleplaying Games which build worlds and burn them down with the aid of imaginations and dice rolls! The Adventurers Guild have recently enjoyed a volunteer trip to Tabletop Scotland in Edinburgh to meet indie game publishers and see all the new exciting projects just released. The Youth Highland Portable Games Library is now stocked with Strathclyde's own Sleepy Sparrow Game new release, DEAD AIR, a game about making your own radio broadcasts across the Scottish post-apocalyptic wasteland, just one of many new games that will be played in YHAG. Watch this space for the team's own new design - the Youth Highland Original Roleplaying Game! 	
Learners have taken up a training, volunteering or employment opportunity	**From Isolation to Independence: Najma's Journey** Adult Learner, Najma Begum, who had recently moved from Bangladesh to Alness was supported last year by Highland Council Adult Learning Coordinator, Marie, to attend ESOL classes and initially she felt quite isolated, so Marie spent a lot of time supporting her and going with her to The Field with Lucy Campbell, when Flip of the Coin was still based there. A referral for employment was made for Najma and her husband, Mohammed, to the Highland Council. In the meantime, Marie supported them both to update their CVs, navigate Indeed and apply for jobs. Najma was later helped to find volunteer opportunities and started volunteering with Girlguiding in Alness and at the Perrins Community Centre with her husband who also volunteered there. Mohammed always made himself available and was happy to help with deliveries and other tasks. Following the referral, they were supported by Emma McEwan from Emspired. After a few months, Mohammed successfully found a job in a café in Invergordon, while Najma started online training with CALA, recommended by Emma. Najma had a baby a few months ago and stopped attending our classes for a while. She contacted Marie recently to ask for support with completing a childcare course. Emma is no longer working with Najma and had left her with the CALA childcare courses to complete online.	

Najma was introduced to the new Adult Learning support worker, Joolz, and encouraged her to join the Language Café in Alness, as she was feeling isolated at home with the baby. At first, she was worried about being a nuisance and said that her baby might cry but was encouraged to come along. The Capstone Centre is an ideal place for families with a play area next door. Recently the Adult Learning team, started to deliver the ESOL Language Café at the Capstone Centre to encourage Learners to connect with the local community and develop the confidence and habit of accessing these places independently. Joolz picked Najma and her baby up from the bus station and brought them along. Everything went well and Najma came again the following week as she felt comfortable with the group environment. Joolz has also started supporting Najma with her childcare training so that she can be ready for employment when her baby starts nursery.

A few months ago, Marie also showed Najma a driving theory website where she could practise as she was keen to pass her test. She has now successfully passed her driving theory test! Najma has never been to the new Flip of the Coin site – The Flipside in Alness – which has a yurt. It was beneficial for her to go along with her baby for a few sessions so that she could become familiar with the place and feel more comfortable going there independently in the future.



Najma will continue to be supported and there are plans to take the whole ESOL group there during the school holidays instead of running the Language Café. This will help to build connections with the local community, reduce loneliness and remove some of the barriers that can make it difficult for learners to access these places independently. It has been really lovely to see Najma's progress, confidence and independence grow over time, and we are looking forward to continuing to support her and her family.



Volunteering in the Community

Authentic ESOL Learning in Context, Employability and Preparation for the World of Work

Four learners have undertaken organised volunteering placements, providing valuable opportunities to practise English in authentic settings while developing employability skills through the ESOL Resettlement Programme (ARAP).

Current placements include:

✓ **Nadera P.** – Volunteer Cook at Millburn Academy Kitchen (arranged with The Highland Council Catering Department), two days per week, commenced April 2026.

✓ **Mahjabin R.** – Stockroom and Shop Floor Assistant at the British Heart Foundation Charity Shop, one day per week, commenced April 2026.

✓ **Sayed O. and Shahid O.** – Gardening and grounds maintenance volunteers at Flip of the Coin, Alness, once per week, commenced June 2026

The Place and The Field, Alness

The Place Youth Club was established more than 35 years ago and is at the heart of all youth related activities in Alness. They deliver a wide range of youth activities, projects, and community events that encourage active participation and engagement.

The Place Drop-In and The Field provide a safe and consistent environment, open five days/six nights weekly to meet local demand. They primarily support vulnerable young people—those who are not academically engaged or active in mainstream services.

Many attend straight from school and remain until closing, often hungry, tired, and in need of care. Young people facing third-generational disadvantage, chaotic home lives, and increasing exposure to drugs and exploitation. Many struggles with structure, behaviour, and understanding employer expectations, which severely limits their future opportunities. To combat this, we provide structured activities and community projects, through which young people can earn SQA-recognised qualifications, helping build CVs and improve employability.





The Field in Alness

In the Field young people focus on practical life skills, including cooking, money management, and supporting young people who are furthest from the job market to become work-ready and develop key skills such as communication, managing emotions, and problem-solving. Young people not just there to achieve their personal goals, but to see themselves as confident, capable individuals who can make a positive difference in their community.

The Place has strong partnerships with various specialist agencies and host targeted sessions with Crocus, Connecting Young Carers, Mikeysline, SDS, NHS Highland, Compass Collective, Highlife Highland Active Schools Co-Ordinator, Police Scotland, Invergordon Fire Station, Blooming Gardeners, DNA Dance, Local Schools, Ankerville Nurseries, Comraich, Criminal Justice Team, DWP, DYP, Fyrish Gymnastics, Alness Gala Committee.

Refugee and Asylum-seeking families

The Place team in Alness has extensive experience supporting refugee and asylum-seeking families, involved from the early stages of Syrian refugee resettlement, and witnessing first-hand the challenges they faced, from racism and isolation to the emotional strain of family separation. Several Syrian young people became highly engaged in the programmes, gaining recognised qualifications through volunteering. One was named Volunteer of the Year, and another is now a youth worker on The Place staff team. Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) have no family support, so the team focuses on providing compassionate, trauma-informed support in a wraparound care that offers consistency and kindness.

The Place programmes provide diverse opportunities for young people, children, families and the wider community, with sessions including Alton Towers trips, Christmas Fayre, youth club sessions, group work and 1:1 support, Ankerville Nursery activities, P7 school parties, school trips, the SNAP summer programme, Playscheme, The Place Drop In, Fyrish Gymnastics and Family Fun Days.

Golspie Youth Action Project - Drug Awareness Training

Golspie Youth Action Project (GYAP) had a day of learning, sharing and partnership working when they welcomed 40 people to their Drug Awareness Training, delivered by the fantastic Talk About Trust. They opened the training up to organisations from across the Highland Council area, and there was an excellent response to see such a wide range of people attending, including those from third-sector organisations, Highland Council and statutory services. Bringing different organisations together for training like this is important as it gives everyone the opportunity to build knowledge, have open conversations about the issues affecting our young people and communities, and ensure those working on the ground feel better informed and equipped. The TALK



	ABOUT Trust is looking forward to making the journey back up to support GYAP in delivering another valuable training opportunity.	

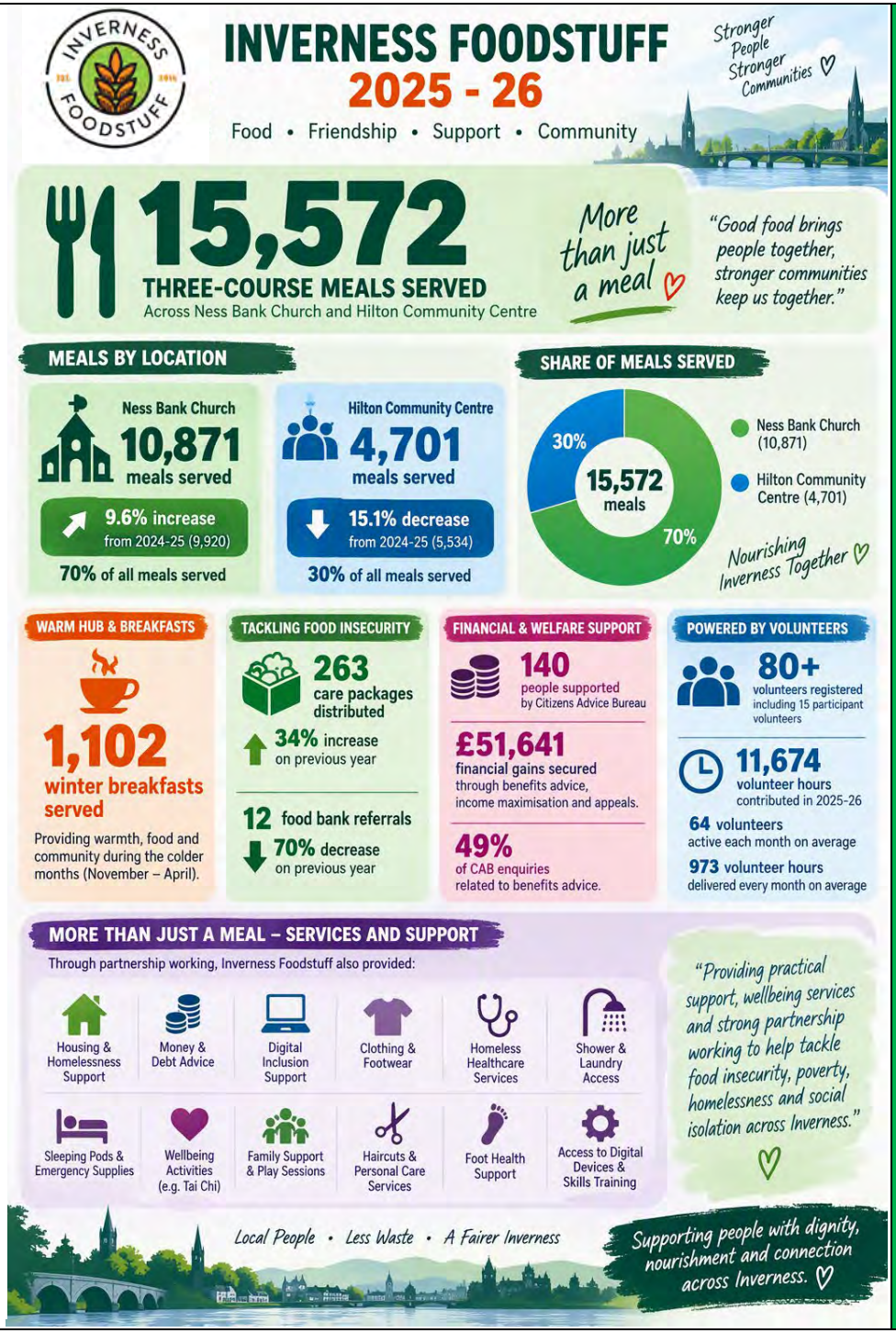
Inverness Foodstuff

Inverness Foodstuff aims to support the homeless and tackle social isolation, challenge food poverty and combat food waste, reduce harm and enable people to improve their health and well-being. It runs a vibrant community, centred around providing help, meals, and company, for those who, in a variety of ways, face day-to-day challenges. Based at two sites at Ness Bank Church (Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday) and Hilton Community Centre (Wednesday and Friday) in Inverness. The Inverness Foodstuff Impact report shows that **15,572 three-course meals** and 1**,102 warm-hub breakfasts** were served in 2025-26 by more than **80 volunteers** over **11,674 volunteer hours**. The financial and welfare services

Participants are welcomed, accepted and heard – improving their wellbeing and sense of self-worth. A range of services and welfare supports can be accessed with 49% of CAB referrals supporting 140 people, creating £51,641 in financial gains and benefits advice.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Inverness Foodstuff with more than 80 fulfilling many different roles. Their contribution is celebrated by the staff, Board and clients.





Inverness Foodstuff celebrates dedication of volunteers

Photographs of Inverness Foodstuff volunteers – Annie, Gilly and Emma – have been exhibited as part of the Women of Inverness exhibition. The portraits were taken by award-winning photographer **Jenny Matthews**, a visiting professor at UHI, to mark International Women's Day 2026. The exhibition features 17 portraits of women from Inverness, alongside photographs of women taken by students, and is being shown at the UHI Inverness campus. Between them, Annie, Gilly and Emma have dedicated an incredible 25 years of volunteering to Inverness Foodstuff. They are a fantastic example of the talented, capable and committed women we are proud to have supporting our work.



Anne Griffiths



Gilly Thomson



Emma Laidlaw

Jenny spent half a day at Inverness Foodstuff taking photographs. She has risked her life documenting and photographing women in war-torn countries around the world. She has spent a lifetime travelling the globe documenting, filming and photographing conflict and human rights issues, with a particular focus on women and girls. Her work includes documenting the guerrilla war and independence of Eritrea, the Rwandan genocide, and humanitarian crises in Sudan and Afghanistan, to name but a few. You can see some of Jenny's work at Jenny Matthews – Panos Pictures

Case Study - Work. Life. Highland

A young person based in the Inner Moray Firth area was referred to the Work. Life. Highland employability team after experiencing difficulties securing employment, despite actively applying for jobs and regularly progressing to the interview stage. Motivated and hardworking, they found it challenging to confidently communicate their skills and experience in formal interview settings.

Through tailored one-to-one support, the team helped the individual build confidence, strengthen interview skills, and better showcase their strengths to potential employers. At the same time, the Work. Life. Highland Employer Engagement Co-ordinator was developing links with a local employer. Working closely with the individual's key worker, they identified the person as an excellent fit for a newly created role and supported both the candidate and employer throughout the recruitment process. The employer also adjusted working hours to accommodate public transport, enabling the individual to travel independently and sustain employment.

The young person is thriving in their role, enjoying the varied and practical aspects of the work, and has become a valued, reliable, and enthusiastic member of the team.

Work.Life. Highland
unlocking your work potential

Aban Outdoor has been recognised as 1 of only 2 employers to win the Gold Highland Employer Charter to recognise and celebrate organisations that are committed to fair pay, fair work, a highland circular economy, and who are creating positive, supportive workplaces across the whole Highland region. Kate is pictured with Derek Brown, CEO Highland Council.



Kate from Aban has also secured 2-years funding to work in partnership with Planet Youth and 12 other partners in Highland to create more Adventurous Learning opportunities for young people in the local area. PY has formed a Community Action Group, and they will review the survey results, in order to create an Action Plan for the area. The plan is to increase protective factors to reduce the chances of younger children starting to take part in negative risk-taking behaviours such as using substances, bullying, self-harming, risky sexual behaviours amongst others. Adventurous Learning has a strong role to play in prevention. Àban adventures offer healthy time outdoors, physical activity, positive relationships with peers and trusted adults, opportunities to experience success and achievement and a safe and supportive community, including good role models.

Adult Learning support leads to Tesco Customer Service Awards

Michael (his chosen English name) is a refugee from Saudi Arabia and arrived in the UK with no English. Michael engaged with the Adult Learning service as a complete beginner. He is an extremely positive polite individual who was a professional entertainer in his native country before having to flee persecution. After mastering basic language skills Michael's desire was to find employment in the local community. Michael's main challenge was his lack of language skills; he had to learn the Latin script before he could read and write for example.

Outcomes

Michael was able to gain some work experience as a volunteer at a local charity shop which helped him to practice English with coworkers and customers. He progressed into a job at the local Tesco supermarket retrieving trolleys where he was known for being extremely polite and helpful to customers. Later he was successful is getting a job working inside the shop where everyone in the local community knows him for being very friendly, helpful, and polite. He has settled in the local community and continues to work in Tesco where he has since won customer service awards. Michael has recently completed both an English language exam and the Life in the UK Test and has qualified for British Citizenship.

Opportunities/Reflection



As well as general English the Adult Learning Coordinator was able to focus on employability with Michael to develop a CV, write cover letters and prepare for interviews. The application process for Tesco's was extremely challenging, even for a native speaker. Without assistance Michael could not have completed it himself, yet with support he got into full-time employment. Many other Adult Learners, both ESOL and domestic learners, have been helped to complete Tesco's supermarket job application process.

Lochview Rural Training



Lochview Rural Training have recently won the **Outdoor Learning and Environment Award** at the National YouthLink Scotland Awards in Glasgow. Previous to that, Cara was shortlisted as one of the top 5 women in the UK for the **Training & Education Woman of the Year Award** at the National Women in Agriculture Awards in London. Based in Lairg, Lochview Rural Training support children, young people and adults to build confidence, learn practical skills and discover new opportunities through a wide range of programmes, including:

- **One-to-one tailored** support for individuals who need extra guidance to achieve their goals

💼 **Land to Livelihoods** – helping people develop employability skills, explore self-employment and take positive steps towards work or further education

🦙 **Introduction to the Land-Based Sector** – providing hands-on experience and insight into the many careers available across agriculture, crofting, conservation, forestry and rural industries

🤝 **Intergenerational Programme** – bringing different generations together to share skills, stories and experiences while tackling loneliness and strengthening our rural communities.

🏫 **Supporting local primary schools** through outdoor learning, croft visits and practical activities that inspire children to connect with nature, food production, the environment and Scotland's rural heritage.



🚜 **Ladies' Beginners Croft Sessions** – build confidence and learn practical crofting skills in a supportive, hands-on environment tailored for women who want to learn more about Tractor Driving & Handling, Safe ATV Operation and Basic Maintenance & Care.



Roots & Resilience project – a new hut has been built with support from the Murphy Group for the Men's group. Mikeysline Hive on the Road is a partner that supports the Men's project.



RSABI
Supporting People in Scottish Agriculture
FOR 125 YEARS
1897 - 2022

RSABI Mental Health First Aid Training in Sutherland and Wester Ross

RSABI is bringing its pioneering Mental Health First Aid Training to the north west Highlands in October. Delivered in partnership with IED Training Solutions Ltd, founded by former Royal Marines, this training is designed to encourage more open conversations about mental health, reduce stigma and help people recognise when someone may be struggling.

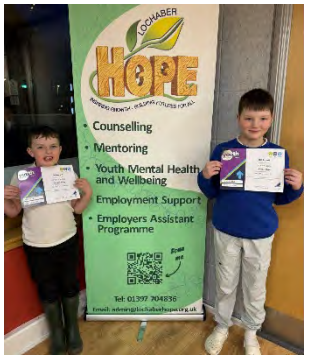
Participants will have the opportunity to gain certification in the SCQF Level 5 Award in First Aid for Mental Health, learning practical skills to recognise a range of mental health conditions, start supportive conversations and signpost individuals to appropriate professional support. Sessions are being held throughout October in Assynt Leisure Centre Lochinver (16 Oct), Scourie Hall Sutherland (17 Oct) and Coigach Community Hall, Ullapool (18 Oct). Whether you are a farmer, crofter, consultant, adviser, inspector or someone who regularly works with people in rural communities, this training could help you make a real difference.



The BrightMinds Project at Lochaber Hope

The BrightMinds Project is a Youth Engagement and Development project ran by Lochaber Hope and funded by the National Lottery Fund. Youth Scotland Hi5 Awards are a big part of youth achievement at BrightMinds and so is having fun and being outdoors where young people learn new skills.

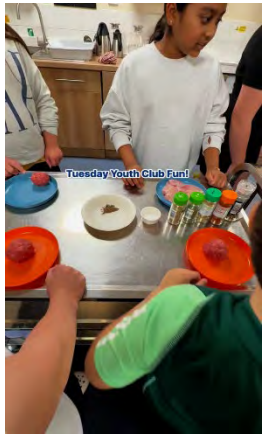




Please click on the two images below to watch the 2 reels of young people learning and having fun



At the BrightMinds youth club they believe in having adventure and teamed up with Green Minds Space for a brilliant evening down at the shore. Before heading out, they got hands-on in the kitchen prepping their own bread dough. Then, under the sunshine, 11 young people and staff walked to the storefront for some outdoor fun where they explored rock pools, found crabs, collected cool stones, and built a fire together. Best of all, they cooked their homemade bread over the flames and shared it with friends. Nothing beats good company, fresh sea air, and the smell of bread baking on a beach fire



Burger Flipping & Plane Zipping! 9 awesome young people had a grill-tastic evening of homemade burger making and yes, they were delicious! After fuelling up, they got crafty with paper aeroplanes, designing, decorating, and launching them in a race to see whose plane could soar the furthest.

Gaelic CLD in Highland

Gaelic Community Learning and Development delivers Adult and Family Learning programmes which contribute directly to the Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan 2024–29. Activity supports Gaelic users and learners within their communities and networks and provides initiatives which encourage Gaelic language learning and use by young people and families in the home. Through progressive adult learning, family learning, parental support, community-based activities and partnership working, CLD strengthens opportunities for the acquisition and use of Gaelic across home, education and community settings.

Gaelic CLD directly supports delivery of The Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan 2024–29, particularly in:

- ✓ Strategic Priority 1.1: increasing support for Gaelic users and learners in their communities and networks.
- ✓ Specific GLP outcomes include increasing extra-curricular activities delivered through Gaelic, developing cultural events with Gaelic schools, and working with High Life Highland (HLH) and Gaelic organisations to increase sporting and outdoor learning opportunities for GME pupils across Highland.
- ✓ Partnership projects with HLH, including the GME40 years "Past and Present project, linking directly with both the HLH Archive and the Community Leisure and Sports service, provided community and youth engagement and informed practical examples of these strategic GLP commitments being delivered through community learning and engagement.

GME 40 Years Celebration in Highland projects in collaboration with HLH - Gaelic Shinty Festival

HLH delivered a Gaelic Shinty Festival as part of the 40 Years of Gaelic Medium Education Celebrations. The festival celebrated both Shinty and the Gaelic language, bringing together GME schools & pupils and key partners including the Camanachd Association from across Highland. The event was open to all P3/P4 GME pupils and took place at the Bught Park, Inverness. The event was participation focused, with schools encouraged to bring both Shinty playing and non-playing pupils. The festival involved shinty matches, skills development sessions, and included access to the newly opened Sgeul na Camanachd Museum, enriching pupils' cultural understanding of Shinty and its Gaelic heritage. The event showcased Gaelic Medium Pupil Leadership, with upper Primary pupils and Secondary School Young Leaders supporting the pupils prepare and helping with the delivery across the day






HLH Archive Service in Skye

HLH Archive Service in Skye collaborated with The Highland Council Gaelic Team to deliver an ambitious programme of events throughout 2026 celebrating 40 years of Gaelic Medium Education (GME) in the Highlands and Islands. The Gaelic and Cultural project named "Past and Present" developed a range of commemorative and engagement resources, including professionally

designed exhibition banners, pop-up displays, and commemorative gifts for pupils, such as notebooks and bags. While these resources celebrate a significant milestone, their purpose extends far beyond the anniversary year, creating lasting tools that will continue to support Gaelic education, cultural learning, and community engagement for years to come.

At the heart of the project is a rolling programme of archive-led learning sessions delivered in schools and community settings. Using archival photographs, documents, maps, and objects, pupils and community members are encouraged to explore the history of Gaelic Medium Education and the wider story of Gaelic language and culture in their communities. The programme includes a pop-up exhibition, hands-on learning activities, and special weekend access to Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre to increase public engagement with local heritage and archives. School sessions have focused on introducing pupils to archives—what they are, why they matter, and how they help preserve community memory.

Visits to Kilmuir and Staffin Primary Schools have seen pupils actively contribute to a specially created GME40 time capsule. Using bilingual Gaelic and English worksheets, pupils have recorded their memories, hopes, experiences, and reflections on Gaelic education today. These contributions will become part of a time capsule to be opened in 40 years' time, creating a powerful connection between past, present, and future generations of Gaelic speakers and learners. Further visits are planned after the summer holidays, extending the project's reach to more schools across the region.








Engagement to Date

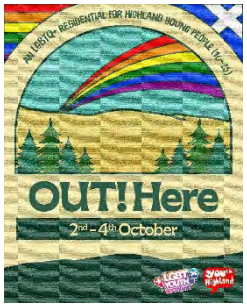
- Special Weekend Opening at Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre – **45 attendees**
- Staffin and Kilmuir Schools Celebration Cèilidh – **100 attendees**
- Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh event – **45 attendees**
- Engagement sessions at **Cultarlann Inbhir Nis**

Youth Highland is Over the Rainbow



The Youth Highland team and volunteers travelled to Manchester in connection with their '**Over the Rainbow'** LGBTQ+ project to meet project partners The Proud Trust and other UK partners.
The Proud Trust supports youth groups to deliver educational workshops to children and young people in schools that give a positive representation of LGBT+ people and identities. They give children and young people an opportunity to positively explore and discuss gender identity and/or sexual orientation. This leads to challenging participants to think of ways in which they can contribute to creating LGBT+ inclusive and positive schools, colleges or youth work settings.





Youth Highland is working with Derek Sawyer from The Highland Council to form the LGBTQ+ Network. **Over the Rainbow** has its first residential weekend OUT! Here at the Badaguish Outdoor Centre in the Cairngorms. The Youth Highland team are working with LGBTQ+ Youth Scotland for the LGBTQ+ Residential aimed at Highland young people aged 16-25 at the stunning Glenmore Forest where they will stay in cosy lodges and enjoy fun activities, opportunities to meet new people and make friends, and provide a chance to share ideas about the future of LGBTQ+ life in the Highlands in a relaxed & inclusive space

Poverty and Equality Commission Companion Report- Young People's Experiences of Poverty and Equality in Highland

Youth Highland carried out a consultation using a variety of methods throughout May 2026 on behalf of the Poverty and Equality Commission. **236** young people took part in an online survey. **214** different young people took part in interactive in-person focus groups in youth club settings across the region. Most respondents were between the ages of 12 and 25. **29** young people participated in an event to pull together findings and created call to action statements on six themes: Access, Education, Cash, Power, Housing and Jobs.

To ensure young people's voices are heard and responded to the following key **policy priorities** should be considered:



1. Prioritise affordable housing solutions for young people and young adults.
2. Address transport and connectivity barriers for young people in rural communities.
3. Strengthen pathways into quality employment, apprenticeships and further education.
4. Improve access to youth activities, social infrastructure and community spaces.
5. Embed meaningful youth participation within all local decision-making structures.
6. Develop targeted approaches to reducing rural and place-based inequalities.
7. Increase support for financial resilience and economic inclusion among young people.
8. Ensure all anti-poverty strategies explicitly consider young people's experiences and perspectives.
9. Include young people in the development and delivery of equalities learning programmes (including to tackle racism and misogyny) in schools and in community settings.

	10. There needs to be clear training and CPD routes to improve the confidence and competence of professionals with responsibility for working with young people to help them meet their potential.	

Highlife Highland Leadership Programme Awards 25-26

Category of Award	2024-25	2025-26
No. of Young People registered in the year	1,069	**847**
Total No. of Young Leaders through programme since 2017	7,796	8,905
Total No. of Volunteer hours of leadership	26,900	**56,775** at least
Total No. of Leadership hoodies awarded in year	1,076	1,119
Ambassador Hoodies	10	4
Diamond Hoodies (1000 hours) & presentation	5	4
Platinum Hoodies (750 hours) & fundraiser	6	10
Gold Hoodies (500 hours)	30	14
Silver Hoodies (250 hours)	54	35
Yellow Hoodies (150 hours) & volunteering with MH charity	n/a	25
Red Hoodies (100 hours) Choose to Lead Level 5 Award	17	22
Green Hoodies (75 hours) Choose to Lead Level 4 Award	70	48
Purple Hoodies (50 hours) & unaccredited training	152	167
Navy Hoodies (25 hours)	475	484
Navy T-Shirts	266	287
The following training took place:		10
First Aid Basketball Skills (Basketball Scotland) Leading Athletics, Let's Go Athletics – (Scottish Athletics) Dance Leaders, Intro to Choose To Lead, Choose to Lead (HLH) Youth Achievement (Youth Scotland) Netball leaders, Intro to Coaching Netball, On the Whistle (Netball Scotl Badminton Basics x 2 (Badminton Scotland) Hockey Leaders (Scottish Hockey) SFA – Online courses CALA Online courses Play Leaders, Disability Inclusion & Safe Guarding.		
New Award 2025-26		
Yellow Hoodie – 150 Hours + volunteering with a Mental Health of choice		



Highlife Highland Leadership Programme
Bee the Change Intergenerational Choir – Charleston Academy



The Bee the Change Intergenerational Choir is the original intergenerational ensemble created by Charleston Academy pupil support assistant, Diana Lennon, and supported by Youth Development Officer, Nicki Strachan. They headlined at Belladrum 2026 with Callum Beattie after forming a partnership with Mikeysline to create a safe, supportive space where young people facing mental health challenges could connect through music. *"Bee the Change Choir is more than just singing, it's about finding your voice, having the confidence to use it and knowing that you don't have to face things alone"* Mikeysline's Bee The Change Manager, Allana Stables

Developed as part of the Highlife Highland Leadership Programme, Nairn Youth Development and Mikeysline supports the Nairn High school students to lead, mentor, and perform alongside the much-loved Nairn Bee Intergenerational Choir. Their aim is to build confidence, reduce isolation, and promote mental wellbeing. Recently the young ones from Auldearn Nursery brought music, joy and togetherness to St. Olaf Care Home in Nairn where residents, staff and the young visitors joined voices to create a warm, uplifting atmosphere filled with smiles, confidence and connection in a rendition of *"You are my sunshine"* These sessions are a highlight as they bring a blend of shared talent, friendship and magic that happens when generations come together through song. The room was full of happy faces, gentle harmonies and those special moments that stay with you long after the music ends.



Volunteering leads to glittering career in engineering

At age 15, Archie Webster won the Inspiring Young Leader of the Year Award in 2024 at the Highlife Highland i-CARE Awards for being the first ever young person to be awarded with a Diamond Hoodie for completing 1,000 hours of volunteering in the HLH Leadership Programme, having completed all eight Hoodie milestones in the programme in 2½ years. In 2025 Archie won the HTSI Award for Young Leader of the Year. Now in 2026, at age 17, Archie is studying an HNC at UHI Inverness during his final year at Inverness Royal Academy and has secured an apprenticeship as an Electrical



Energy Engineer with a major power company at the end of his year-long Next Generation HNC Engineering course at UHI Inverness.



Sports Ambassador wins Gold Hoodie Award at Portree High School

S4 pupil Ariannah Cooke from Portree High School has achieved her Gold Hoodie Award in recognition of 500+ hours of volunteering presented by Joanie Whiteford, Lord-Lieutenant of Ross & Cromarty. Ariannah's leadership journey began as a Junior Leader in primary school, where her enthusiasm and commitment for helping others quickly shone through.

Ariannah has continued to volunteer at a wide range of Active Schools events, supporting activities such as basketball festivals, cross country and dance events. Her love of Dance has played a significant role in Ariannah's volunteering journey. After completing her Dance leadership course in S2, she went on to support younger pupils at LMPA Academy - Lorayne McLucas Performing Arts Academy in Broadford where she continues to be a valued and inspiring volunteer. She has also recently taken on the role of Sports Ambassador at Portree High, continuing to promote sport, physical activity and leadership amongst her peers.

University of the Highlands & Islands (UHI) – Argentinian pupils enjoy Highland culture

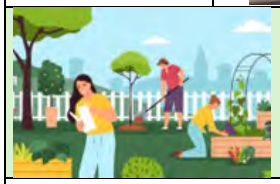


54 Argentinian pupils and eight teachers from Escuela Modelo Mariano Acosta in Don Bosco, Buenos Aires Shinty visited the Highlands for a six-day programme organised by UHI. The visit was designed to help the students develop their English language skills while experiencing Highland culture and traditions. They were joined by other schools including Nairn Youth Development to enjoy a range of educational, social and sporting activities, including morning classes in cooking, acting and politics at the campus and a cruise on Loch Ness, curling sessions at Inverness Ice Centre and visits to the Inverness Castle Experience and Culloden Battlefield. Along with a traditional ceilidh at Inverness Town House, one of the highlights was a shinty experience hosted by Inverness Shinty Club when they learned about the sport and its history, played a shinty match with local youngsters, and visited its newly renovated pavilion.



UHI Roadshow brings course and career advice to Highland communities

A partnership led by UHI Inverness with Developing the Young Workforce Inverness & Central Highland (DYWICH) and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) has been running a Roadshow in Inverness (3 events), Aviemore and Dingwall To support students with their exam results, the #NoWrongPath campaign encourages young people to recognise there is no single route to a successful career. It reassures young people that results do not define their future and raises awareness of the range of pathways available by working with employer and professionals to share their own career journeys.



CLD Priority 5: Community Development & Resilience

CLD facilitates increased community capacity and resilience in communities most affected by inequalities

CLD in practice – spotlight on Community Development & Resilience

GRO For You Community Innovation Campus in Tain

Officially opened in September 2026, the £1.8 million GRO For You Community Innovation Campus in Tain is a vibrant, educational and fun space for young people, families and community members that brings training, employer need and community support together in one place to create jobs and shared learning experiences while generating a sustainable income to reinvest in community programmes. Gro For You **employs 27 people locally** and has created access to opportunity aimed at narrowing the Highland skills gap with **982 learners** gaining qualifications or completed personal development in 2025. The Gro for You model is focused around two connected strands:

1. **Gro Futures** supports people to develop the skills & employability pathways, working with partners to create the right conditions for growth and innovation.
2. **Gro Communities** starts with whole-family wellbeing, building confidence and connection with local communities through activities and volunteering.

GRO For You

Recently winning the Highland Council's Award for Most Purposeful Business Gro For You puts purpose alongside profit in a sustainable model that creates economic, social and environmental value through food growing and understanding where food comes from, to new skills development needed for the jobs and industries of the future, and opportunities that make better use of resources and strengthen local communities. The values-based Community Innovation Campus integrates renewable energy systems - solar power, air source heat technology and net zero growing technologies - to help reduce the environmental impact of their training café, events space and tourism hub to become more sustainable and provide growing spaces and training programmes for people of all ages.



For You Training

For You Training is a Qualifications Scotland accredited training centre with a proven track record of delivering quality training for learners to meet business needs. Café 11 provides a real-life working environment which connects the family, the school and the employer around the needs of the learner. One parent commented that her daughter had learned new skills after being given the responsibility of a workplace environment to give her the confidence and skills she needed to thrive without feeling she was being taught. Meanwhile, the programme of Community Learning and Development (CLD) courses is aimed at people of all ages and backgrounds and includes Community Cook & Chat, Befriend & Gro, Make & Mend Tain, Community Trade Hub, Horticulture, Volunteering and Train the Trainer.
For You Training aims to inspire future entrepreneurs through early intervention masterclasses, accredited training programmes and Foundation Apprenticeships. Opportunities are aimed at giving young people the best start in life through early years prevention, health & wellbeing, food growing, creative arts and social enterprise, with training services positioned to meet the needs of people in Easter Ross and beyond. For You Training aims to increase employability opportunities for young people, reduce rural depopulation and support local communities to be more sustainable for the future. A list of the Gro For You training courses can be found here.



Measures of impact	Evidence of impact	BRAG
Learners feel more able to help others in need in their community	**Black Isle Community on a mission to save the Kirk at Killearnan** Throughout 2026, community events have continued at Killearnan, Milton of Redcastle on the Black Isle helping to raise funds to save the historic Killearnan Parish Church and Hall for the community. The Kirk at Killearnan SCIO is a community-led charity formed by local residents and congregation members in October 2024 to raise a total of £220,000 to purchase the church and hall from the Church of Scotland. They have also set up a crowdfund to help raise their grand total. The congregation members have run successful events throughout year including a Daffodil Tea and Strawberry Tea with delicious cakes and scones from the legendary Killearnan baking ladies, attracting crowds of regulars and families from the community along with visitors from Conon to Colorado. Four local Art Groups who regularly use the Hall showcased an exhibition of paintings, prints and cards in the church.	



Children and adults were captivated at the Open Day by Amaryllis the donkey and the orphan lambs and had a chance to be photographed in the stocks in the painted guise of a portly pirate. Petrolheads savoured a melange of 1930s motor cars ranging from sleek modern classics to the humble Morris 8. The recent community events have raised over £5,000 from the sales of afternoon teas and Lucky Squares competition to win a Clare Blois painting. A recent visit from the Highland Gospel Male Voice Choir has also brought crowds to the Kirk. The male choir was formed in 1985 and brings joyful song and praise to residents in local care homes, Porterfield Prison and to community gatherings. Below are some pictures of The Kirk at Killearnan community endeavours with the history about the church, and past and future events on information boards.







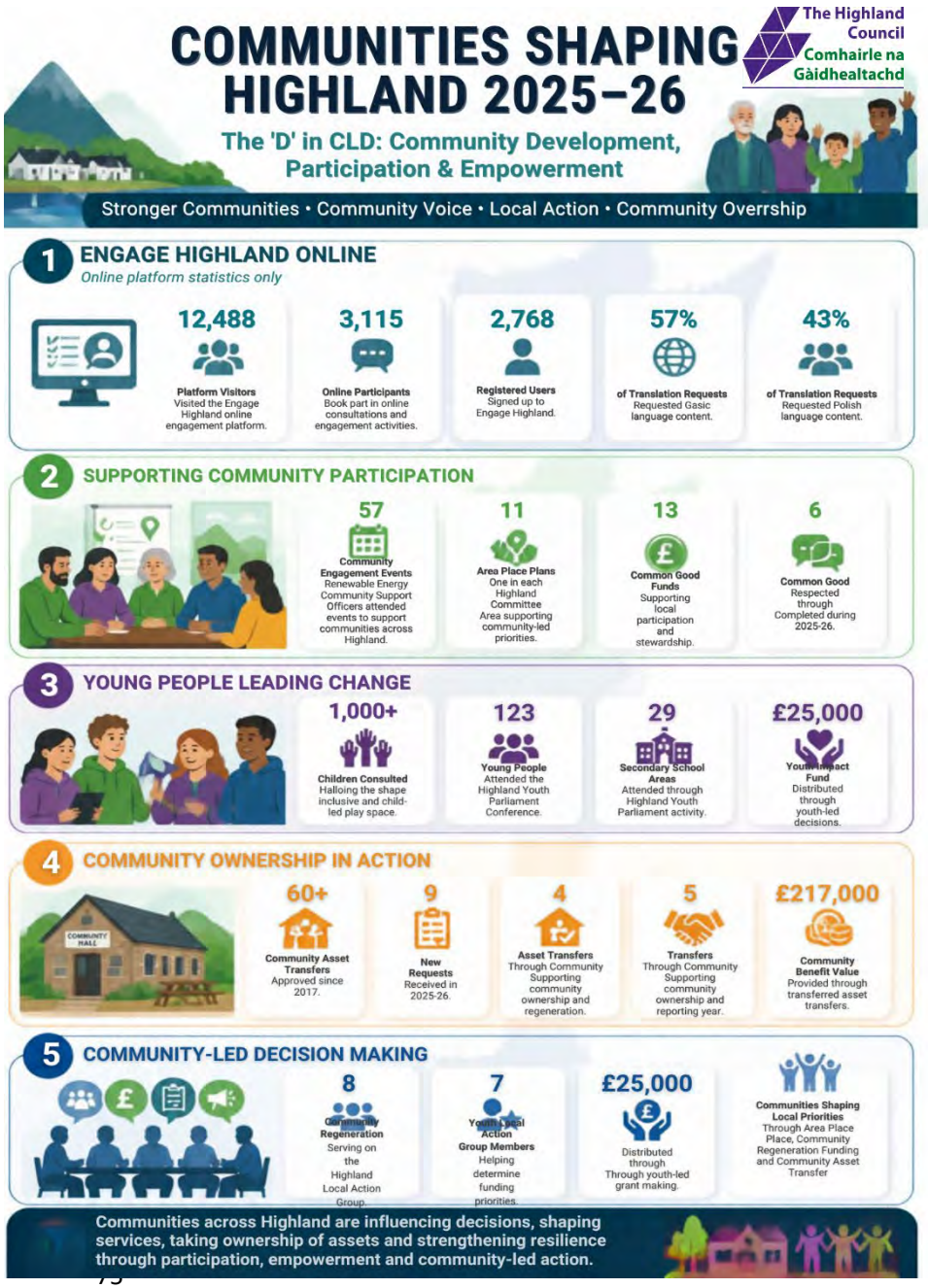
Highland Council Community Development, Participation and Empowerment 2025-26

The Highland Council continues to increase participation and engagement with communities across Highland in line with the Council's Programme and strategy to "Helping our communities to be prosperous, sustainable and resilient – making a positive difference to the lives of people". Their headline data is highlighted in the infographic.

Tackling Poverty and Inequality in Highland

The Highland Local Child Poverty Action Report has recognised the progress made by the Highland Community Planning Partnership during 2025/26 to support children, young people and families living in poverty. The Poverty and Equality Commission report highlighted successful work to develop flexible childcare models in rural communities, support employability, improve financial inclusion and expand whole-family wellbeing services with Bright Spots identified in communities such as ALIenergy, Am Fasgadh, Skye and Lochalsh CAB, Caithness CAB, Connecting Carers, Inverness Foodstuffs, Living Hope, Skye & Lochalsh and New Start Highland. Calls to Action to reduce poverty and inequality include:

- ✓ Transform ways of working with a third sector strategy/operating framework
- ✓ Maximise incomes and address fuel poverty
- ✓ Develop the Hub Approach to reduce the costs of school lets, increase usage of council assets for communities and integrate services
- ✓ Embed Lived Experience into service design, delivery and policy development



Improving the Lives of Gypsy Traveller communities in Highland

The Highland Council is working in partnership with residents on each of the four Gypsy / Traveller sites to meet the ongoing need and demand for culturally appropriate accommodation and facilities to meet the needs of people from the Gypsy / Traveller community to transform where they live into 'great places to live and bring up children'.

Funding has been awarded from the Scottish Government's Gypsy Traveller Infrastructure Fund (GTIF), the low carbon Vacant and Derelict Land Investment Programme, and a contribution from the Council, leading to the successful completion of phases one and two of the new modular "park-style" homes at the Gypsy/Traveller site at Longman Park, Inverness. This will meet local and national commitments to deliver a fairer and more inclusive Highland and improve the lives of Gypsy Travellers, improve and future proof site accommodation and facilities, include changes in the preferences and aspirations and changes in fire safety standards.



Highland Local Action Group

The Community Regeneration Team work with the Highland Local Action Group (LAG) to decide how the Community Led Local Development (CLLD) 2026-27 funding will support local priorities to strengthen communities in the Highlands and reduce inequality.

Chair of the Highland Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Councillor Ken Gowans said, "Local communities are best placed to understand the challenges they face and the opportunities they want to realise. This fund is designed to support that leadership at a grassroots level, enabling organisations to take forward ideas that strengthen communities and tackle inequality."

In the **2026-27 round of funding, 23 projects received funding a total of £158,427.89**.
The two CLLD priorities for 2026-27 are:

- **Priority 1**: **Community Asset Improvements**. This supports projects that make community-run assets stronger, warmer and more sustainable.
- **Priority 2**: **Tackling Inequality for Children, Young People and Families.** This supports short-term, community-led projects that reduce barriers caused by poverty and isolation.

Organisation	Project Title	Grant Approved	Priority
Wick Development Trust	Air conditioning for Wick Campsite reception/shop	£4,474.08	Priority 1
Nairn Bowling Club	Sustainable Community Facility: reducing Waste and Improving Access	£4,722.18	Priority 1
Gairloch and District Times	Production office infrastructure upgrade	£8,098.54	Priority 1
Nairn Community & Arts Centre	Digital Infrastructure Upgrade for Community Access	£10,000.00	Priority 1
Nairn Community & Arts Centre	Strengthening Community Engagement & Financial Sustainability through Marketing Capacity	£8,328.00	Priority 1
Thurso Youth Club SCIO	Refresh Entrance Hall	£3,183.90	Priority 1
Beauly Shinty Club	Toilet Electrical Replacement Programme	£2,000.44	Priority 1
North Kessock Village Hall	Village Hall improvements: kitchen equipment	£2,268.38	Priority 1
Care Lochaber	Community Car Scheme	£10,000.00	Priority 1
Acharacle Community Company	Warm Welcome	£9,377.00	Priority 1
An Talla Solais	Sustainability and Energy Improvements	£3,130.00	Priority 1
Gairloch Community Hall	A Warm Welcome for the community	£6,492.00	Priority 1
Wick Community Hub	Rosebank Playing Fields Pavillion Access, Heating, and Maintenance Improvements	£9,997.12	Priority 1
Ormlie Community Association Ltd	The Social Circle	£3,120.00	Priority 2
Golspie Youth Action Project	GYAP Summer of Fun & Sun (Golspie Summer Activities Programme)	£10,000.00	Priority 2
Lairg & District Learning Centre	Making Space – Family Activities for Families & Young People	£8,334.70	Priority 2
Cuillin FM	YouthSPACE Transitioning to High School	£9,880.00	Priority 2
Tain YMCA	Holiday Support Programme	£9,778.00	Priority 2
Gairloch Community Council	Gairloch Community First Responders	£3,000.00	Priority 2
Youth Highland	Games Games Games!	£10,000.00	Priority 2
Eden Court	FEAST	£6,560.00	Priority 2

Thurso Youth club	Summer Activities	£7,931.75	Priority 2
Mhor Collective	Mhor Connections	£7,751.80	Priority 2

Community Empowerment – Community Asset Transfers

Under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 aims to enhance and increase community benefit outcomes in local communities through improved use of publicly owned assets. Community bodies are empowered through the ownership or control of land and buildings through Community Asset Transfers. Highland Council Community Asset Transfers in 2025-26 include:

- Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO - former Roy Bridge Primary Buildings and grounds for housing
- Fort Augustus Community Company - former Janitor's House to develop local housing.
- Portree and Braes Community Trust - former Swimming Pool, to develop a play area
- Torridon District Community Association has been granted Ownership Development of a new Play Area at the Old Play Park, Torridon with an agreed selling price of £1.

Highland Council Playpark Strategy

The Highland Council Playpark Strategy coordinator provides support to help communities navigate the process of improving play spaces and for those wishing to fundraise to upgrade their local school playground or local Council playparks. Play parks help children to: stay healthy and active, build friendships and social skills, learn through play and feel part of their community.

Blanain Playpark

A small group of parents from Balnain Primary School Parent Council are fundraising to replace Balnain Playpark and ensure their children and future generations have a lovely park to play in and enjoy for many years to come. The Playpark Coordinator, Lynn MacGillvary, is working with the Balnain Playpark community group to support them throughout the process.

- Total amount to be raised £100,000.
- Scottish Government playpark fun through Highland Council allocation £30,000
- Morrisons and Scottish Water will meet the cost of an enhanced drainage scheme as a goodwill gesture to the community and have already repaired and painted the fence, installed a play tunnel and donated a new picnic table
- Soirbheas has provided a grant of £50,000
- Total amount to be raised by community £20,000 via Balnain Playpark fundraiser GoFundMe



Community Partnerships - Partnering for Progress in Lochaber

Following the Partnering for Progress Lochaber event with Lochaber Community Partnership, Fort William 2040 (FW2040), The Highland Council, and Voluntary Action Lochaber, 4 projects in Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh ward have been awarded a total of £79,725.20 under the Community Regeneration Fund:



- **Wester Ross Biosphere** - £ 38,093
  - Build capacity at the UNESCO Biosphere designation to complete the region's first 10-year Periodic Review - a mandatory requirement from UNESCO to maintain the designation beyond 2026
- **Lochalsh & Skye Swimming Pool Association** - £16,380
  - Build resilience and environmental sustainability of the centre.
- **Dornie & District Community Trust** (DDCT) - £11,130
  - The DDCT took ownership of their local old shop building in 2023 to extend and redevelop the existing building into a community hub. This funding will complete the renovation of the community hub and enable it to open to consist of a shop and all year-round café, which will double as a community space.
- **Create inspire Project** CIC - £ 14,122
  - The **Travelling Imaginarium** is a nine-month creative and cultural outreach programme that will be run across five remote and rural communities in the Northwest Highlands: Achiltibuie, Kinlochbervie, Coigach, Ullapool and Garve. At the heart of the project is a small team of musicians and artists seeking to deliver high-quality creative

experiences in each community. In each location, the programme will deliver four workshops and conclude with a final showcase.

Caithness Place Plan priorities delivered by Highland Coastal Communities Fund & the Place Based Investment Programme

4 successful projects in Caithness have secured £258,898 to support local projects across the area to help deliver key priorities including community resilience, tackling poverty, economic recovery, climate action, and addressing rural depopulation.

The projects include:

- **John O'Groats Development Trust**
  - Development of a new destination playpark at John O'Groats (£150,000)
- **Caithness Voluntary Group** – Rural Transport Community Minibus (£43,500)
- **Caithness Voluntary Group** – Third Sector Support Officer (£30,758)
- **Lyth Arts Centre Ltd** – Caithness Artists in Residence 2026 (£34,640)



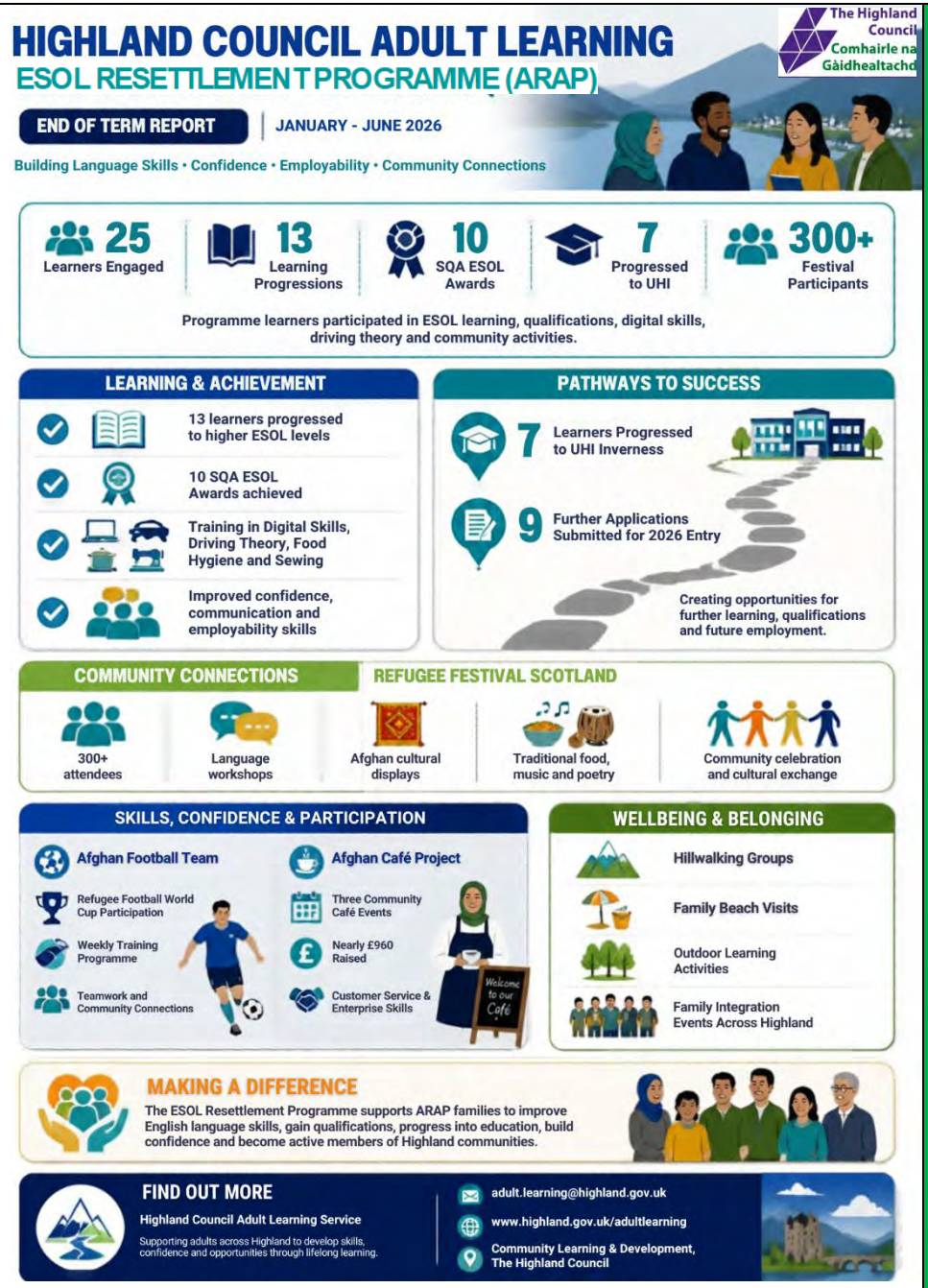
ESOL Resettlement Programme (ARAP)

The Adult Learning Resettlement Team held two special certificate ceremonies for Afghan learners — one for the women's group and the men's group to celebrate learners' dedication, attendance, commitment to learning English, preparation for Qualifications Scotland assessments, successful achievement of accredited qualifications, and progression to further education at the UHI Inverness College.

The Afghan EASOL Learners and their families also took part in the HLH Countryside Rangers Blue/Green Project which was a great success.







Learners are more able to take part in community groups and organisations

Tain & North Highland YMCA Summer Programme

Tain YMCA Summer programme 2026 took place for 6 weeks over the summer holidays. It demonstrates that grassroots charities know and understand their own community, the children, young people and families, and can deliver a professionally run programme based on local needs. Tain YMCA has been in the community for 30 years and is well respected and trusted, with many of today's parents having attended the YMCA when they were young.

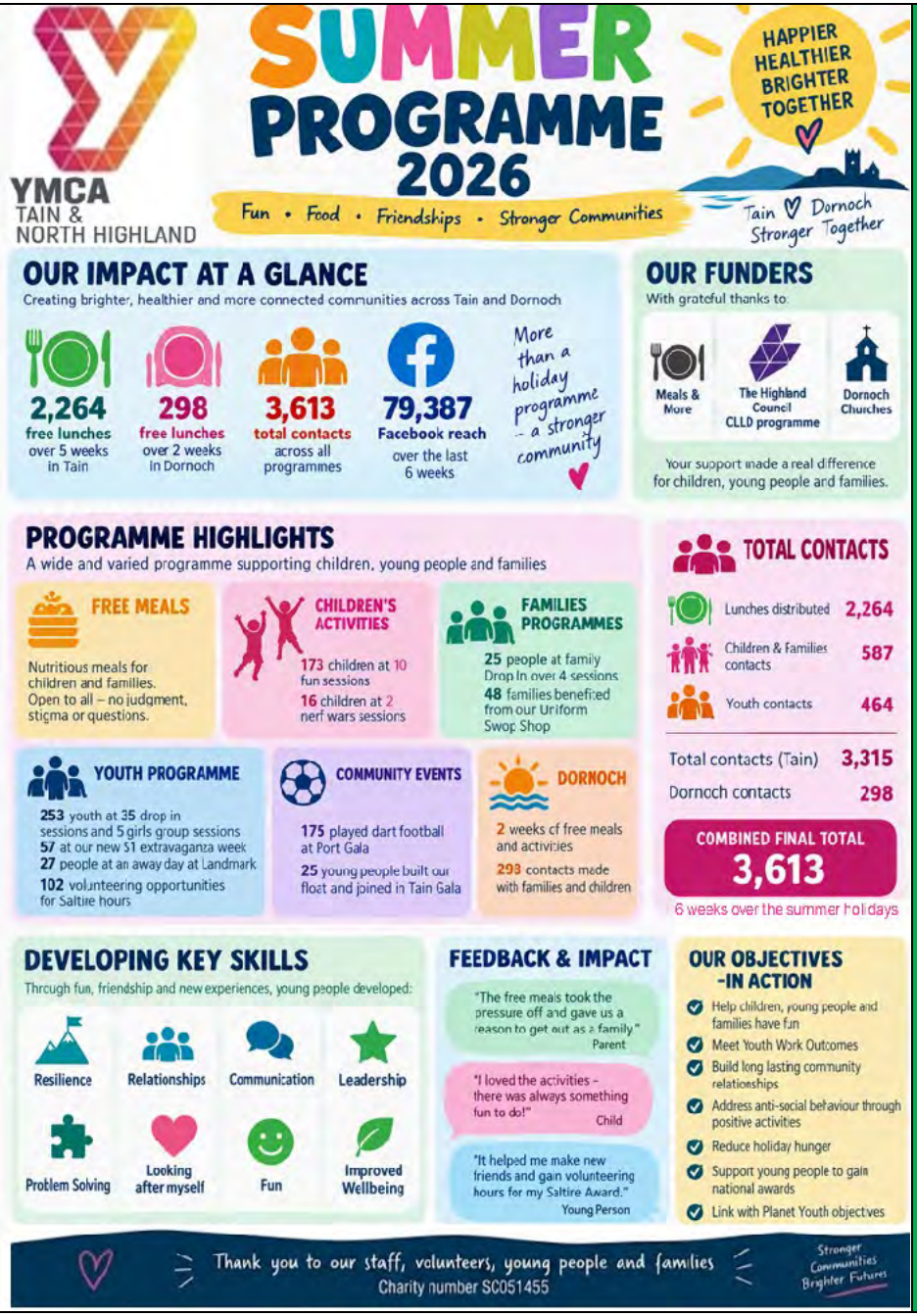
Recommendations from the evaluation:

- ✓ Sustainability of the programme is essential to tackle rural poverty and inequality
- ✓ Earlier certainty around funding awards, timing of grants is essential for grassroots organisations – CLLD Fund is retrospective, creates challenges
- ✓ There is a need for fulltime childcare during holidays

"I really don't know what I would do without it - it's not just about the food but it gets us out of the house to" - Lunch club parent

"There is always nights with food – they are the best" - Female S1over 6 weeks of the summer holidays



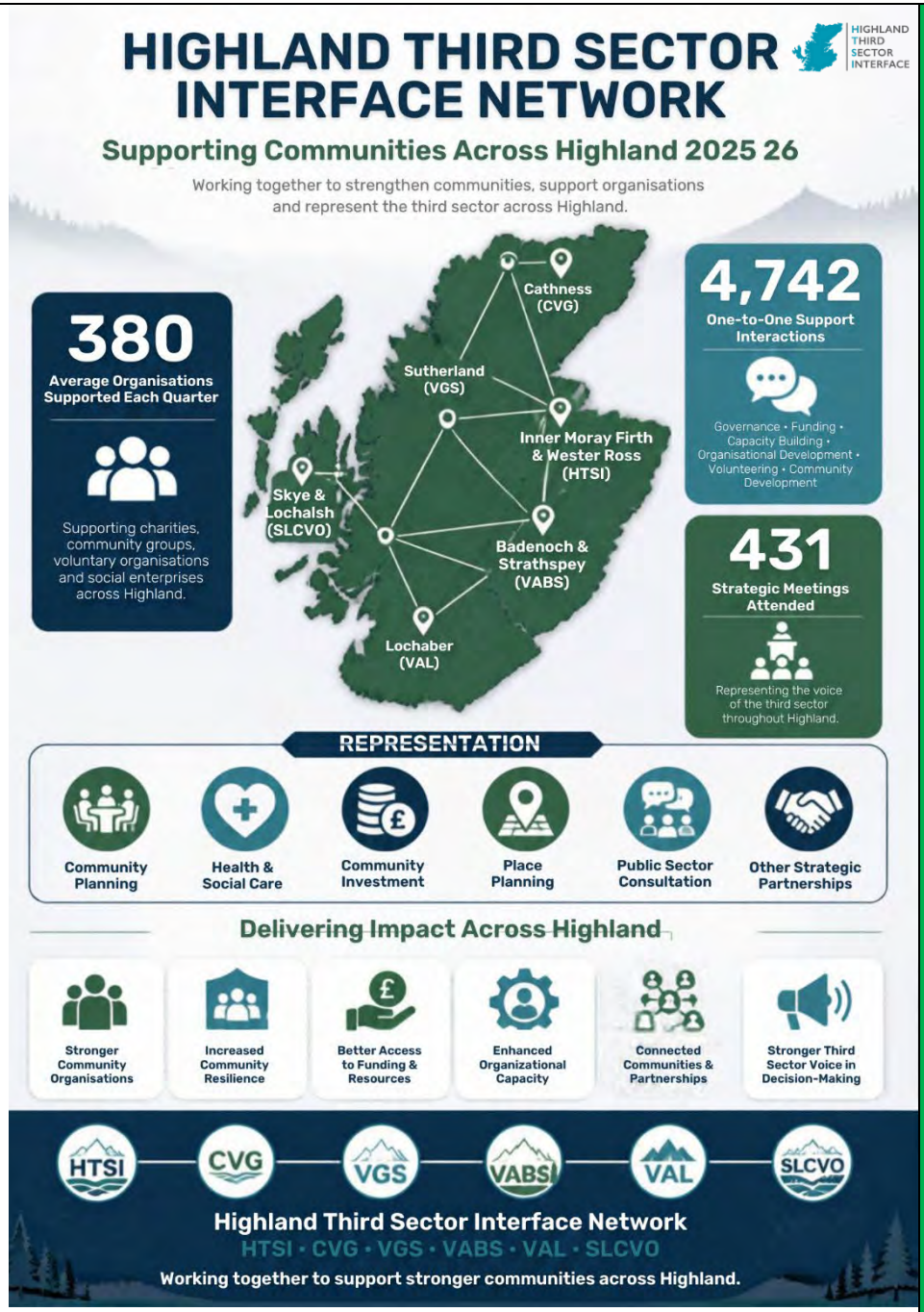


Skye & Lochalsh Council of Voluntary Organisations

SLCVO is one of 5 TSI partners in Highland delivering 1-2-1 support for community groups and voluntary organisations. An example of this is the welcoming spaces they create to relax, eat well and meet local services at the Community Hub in Staffin. Being able to connect with other local people in a friendly place while enjoying a free lunch and finding out what support is available in the community is a vital lifeline in rural parts of Highland and the role of the SLCVO is to coordinate support services for residents to connect



The Skye and Lochalsh Health, Wellbeing, Welfare and Social Care (HWWS) Collaboration is an effective network bringing together community groups, public services and local people to improve how community-led social care, wellbeing, health and welfare support is shaped and delivered across the area so that services are easier to access and more joined-up.



Caithness Pride Intergenerational Unity Bunting Project

Thurso Art Club came together with young people from Thurso High School, Wick High School, Thurso Youth Club and UHI to combine over 120 individual art works in 50-metres of bunting, decorating the town with bright colours and individuality for Caithness Pride in June.

The grassroots bunting added a festive decoration with lots of flags assembled together in a creative display of support for the LGBTQ+ community. The Art Club used canvas and materials that folk have to hand, including felt-tipped pens, so that no-one would be excluded by not having access to paints.



The group are particularly proud that young people from Stepping Out and the High schools have shown great enthusiasm at being involved in creating their own representation and using this opportunity to add their voices. The intergenerational project came about through the older people holding spaces and facilitating forums for younger people to help them feel safe and demonstrate how important they are, and what they offer to the world.

Textile Heritage, Identity and Community

The African Caribbean Asia and Mixed Heritage Association (ACAMHA) has brought together people from different countries, cultures, tribes and continents who share an interest in textile heritage to build stronger relationships between members, celebrate Black and Brown heritage, and develop a deeper sense of belonging within the Highland community. Textiles provide a powerful common language and across cultures, people use cloth, clothing, weaving, braiding, sewing, embroidery and pattern to express identity, tell stories and pass knowledge between generations. ACAMHA members hold a wide range of knowledge and skills, from African textile traditions and Afghan fabrics to memories of grandparents teaching rope braiding, sewing clothes or making traditional garments. The project creates a space where these skills are shared, allowing participants to learn creative techniques while also learning about each other's cultures, experiences and histories and introduces participants to Scottish textile traditions, particularly Highland tartan.

Identity, wellbeing and mental health

At the heart of the project is a belief that identity and wellbeing are closely connected. The traditions passed down through families a grandmother making clothes, a grandfather teaching a craft, a particular fabric worn for celebrations, or a pattern associated with a place or community tell important stories about who we are and where we come from. Maintaining connections to culture helps people feel rooted and connected rather than isolated or disconnected from their history. Having the confidence to express identity through clothing, music, food and other forms of culture has contributed to building resilience, self-esteem and positive mental health.

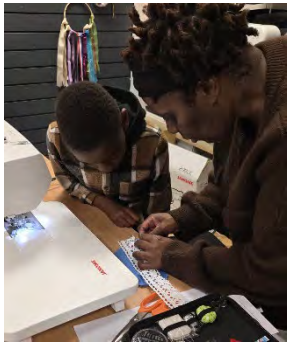
Multi-Heritage Fashion Show

Six Afghan women from the Adult Learning ESOL ARAP Programme have joined the collaboration with ACAMHA in the Multi-Heritage Fashion Show Project. They all experienced dressmakers with advanced sewing skills and have joined African and Scottish seamstresses to design and create garments that celebrate their cultural heritage through traditional clothing, contemporary fashion and heritage patchwork. The finished garments will be showcased at Inverness Castle and Eden Court Theatre.



longer-term legacy

A planned next step is a textile heritage zine, documenting fabrics, clothing, techniques, stories and traditions from the different cultures represented within ACAMHA. This provides a lasting record of the knowledge shared through the project and creates something participants can be proud to publish and distribute. Participants are also exploring entrepreneurial opportunities, including potential pop-up stalls at Inverness Victorian Market. This gives them opportunities to showcase and potentially sell their textile creations, share African and other international textile traditions with the public, and develop confidence and practical experience in creative enterprise. Through textiles, the project brings people together creating relationships across cultures while recognising that difference and shared experience can exist together.




Sewing Workshops at Cameron Youth Centre

Approximately ten Afghan women attended four sewing workshops delivered by volunteer tutor Sandra Chache at Cameron Youth Centre. The workshops were designed for learners with intermediate sewing skills and focused on developing practical techniques through projects such as document folders, tote bags and household accessories. Alongside developing their sewing skills, participants also expanded their English language by learning sewing-related vocabulary and communicating with the tutor in English throughout the sessions.





Refugee Festival Scotland- Afghan Dance and Music Performance

As part of Refugee Festival Scotland, Adult Learning Coordinator Anna Turlej organised a special Afghan Cultural performance at Raigmore Primary School in June. Funded by the Scottish Refugee Council, the event brought together Afghan adult learners from the Adult Learning ESOL Resettlement Programme, their families, pupils from Raigmore Primary School, school staff and members of the wider community to celebrate diversity, inclusion and multiculturalism.

Professional Afghan dance artist Ziba Tabrizi introduced audiences to Afghanistan's rich cultural heritage through traditional dance, music and costume. The interactive performance encouraged enthusiastic audience participation, with many children and adults learning traditional Afghan dance steps and experiencing Afghan music for the first time. It also enabled Afghan learners and their families to proudly share an important aspect of their cultural identity while encouraging mutual respect and social cohesion.



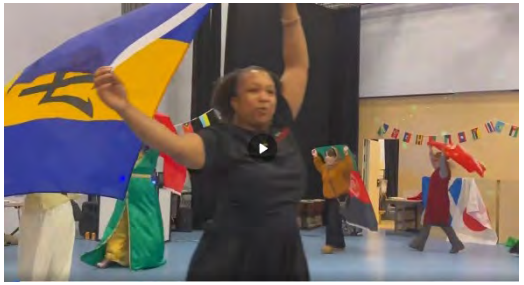


Taste of Culture event brings together community partners

African Caribbean Asian and Mixed Heritage Association (ACAMHA) brought together 200 participants for the Taste of Culture community event in Millburn Academy, Inverness including partners Police Scotland Crime Stoppers, Safe, Strong & Free, Inverness Open Arts, Mindful Chinese Calligraphy and Tea Ti-Chi, MJO Wellbeing Services and other community organisations. People of all ages had a wonderful experience at the joyful celebration of cultural influences, coming together through food, stories, music, dance and experiences that contribute towards a place that people call home.

- ✓ **The Flag parade** highlighted the diverse community of people who live in Highland with country flags represented by people from Sri Lanka, Morrocco, Kurdistan, Afghanistan, China, India, St Kitts and Nevis, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Scotland, Azerbaijan, Jamaica and Portugal. A short video of the Flag Parade can be seen by clicking on the video file below.
- ✓ **Tasmine from Pakistan** talked about culture, food, music in 100s of languages that carry jokes, stories, memories and songs.
- ✓ **The mixed choir** was from 'Mellow Yellow with ASN' in Nairn and 'Ardersier Forte' who sung 'Killing Me Softly' and 'One Love' (let's get together and feel alright)

✓ **Safe Strong & Free and Penguin Drums young people**



Taste of Culture Flag Parade.mp4











Inverness Openarts attended the Taste of Culture event with a busy stall of young people making creative jewellery and decorations. They create welcoming, accessible spaces in Wasps Creative Academy where people can make art, connect with others and experience the benefits of creativity for their wellbeing. Supported by the **HTSI Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Collaborative Fund**, Inverness OpenArts have secured funding until March 2028 in a partnership with New Craigs Psychiatric Hospital, Mikeysline 'Hive on the Road' and Arts in Nature to widen access to creativity, strengthen referral and signposting routes, and bring supportive arts activity into community and wellbeing settings across the Highlands.

Thriving Families Team Development Days with Arts in Nature

The Thriving Families team provide a range of services designed to support children, young people, parents and families through life's challenges, providing a listening ear, practical support, guidance and a safe space when it's needed. Recently the Thriving Families team came together for their Team development days to create Personal Palettes from Nature facilitated by Charlotte from Arts in Nature. It gave them an opportunity to reconnect in person, share ideas, reflect on the work they do, and look ahead to the future of Thriving Families. Just as importantly, it gave them the space to pause, nurture their connections, and look after themselves as a team. The work that Thriving Families does is rooted in connection, compassion and community and the two days were a reminder that looking after the people who support others matters.

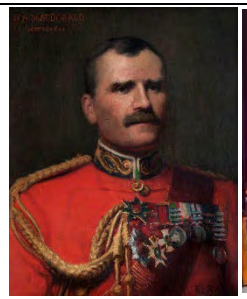


Dingwall 800

In 2026, Dingwall is celebrating 800 years since King Alexander II granted the town Royal Burgh status in 1226.
Images courtesy of Ross & Cromarty Heritage Society Ross include:

- ✓ Dingwall Railway Station which opened on 11 June 1862 to later become part of an extraordinary wartime route with the troop train known as the "Jellicoe Express", carrying personnel between London and Thurso on journeys connected to the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow, passing through Dingwall.
- ✓ A crowd at Dingwall Town Hall when Sir Hector Macdonald (known as "Fighting Mac" after the Battle of Omdurman in 1898), rose from being a crofter's son to a Major General and was awarded the Freedom of Dingwall on 13 May 1899 with a 100-foot Macdonald monument erected in his honour.
- ✓ The Clarsach Society was founded during the Royal National Mòd in Dingwall on 25 September 1931 and in celebration of its 95-year anniversary Fèis Rois coordinated a concert with 27 clarsachs playing in Dingwall Academy






Fèis Rois celebrates 40th anniversary

Kristopher Leask, Green MSP for the Highlands and Islands marked the 40th anniversary with a motion in the Scottish Parliament, “Fèis Rois has made an enormous contribution to the cultural landscape of the Highlands and beyond. Through their year-round programme of events and classes, they make sure young people and adults have the opportunity to engage in traditional music and Gaelic culture, and they provide crucial employment opportunities to musicians and artists in the region.”





Chief Executive, Fiona Dalgetty referred to the poignant moment as they celebrate 40 years of Fèis Rois at an anniversary concert at Eden Court Theatre in Inverness and recognise the "sustained contribution that Fèis Rois has made to strengthening traditional music, the Gaelic language and participation in cultural activities over the last four decades. Bringing together past and present tutors, participants and partners on one stage highlighted the depth of talent nurtured through our programmes and the strength of community that surrounds our charity." Fèis Rois has been awarded funding from Bòrd na Gàidhlig for a Gaelic Officer role to continue their Gaelic development work to support day-to-day use of Gaelic in communities and support Gaelic activity.

World Book Day 2027 - Grumpa agus na Nàbaidhean Ùra



World Book Day 2027 Grumpa agus na Nàbaidhean Ùra - (About the book - Gaelic)

Tha Ceitidh Hutton aithnichte airson a leabhraichean Gàidhlig do chloinn, nam measg an t-sreath èibhinn Grumpa. Tha Ceitidh clàraichte le Urras Leabhraichean na h-Alba mar sgrìobhadair, seanachaidh agus stiùiriche Bookbug na Gàidhlig, agus tha i air a bhith ag obair fad bhliadhnaichean le teaghlaichean agus leasachadh na Gàidhlig. Watch the video of Ceitidh with Grumpa https://youtu.be/bcmPKoL3mms?si=TICEAj6AYuohgMhq Ceitidh Hutton's (Katie Hutton) new book Grumpa agus na Nàbaidhean Ùra (Grumpa and the New Neighbours) is the first Gaelic book to be included in World Book Day 2027. There have been Irish and Welsh books, but never in Gaelic. Illustrated by Sìne Annia NicGhillebhraithe (Annia MacGivvary). Ceitidh also does Gaelic BookBug in Dingwall library once a month with mums, dads and little tots singing lots of Gaelic songs.

Kyleakin Connections

The Kyleakin Connections gang has been busy volunteering at Kyle & Lochalsh Community Trust, out for lunch in Balmacara at the Cosy Corner Cafe, making pottery dishes from clay, litter picking, and paddling kayaks with South Skye and Lochalsh Kayaking Club, thanks to the use of double kayaks from South Skye Sea Kayak (see video reel https://www.facebook.com/reel/1635112098198312)









North West and East Sutherland has been selected as the Pride in Place neighbourhood within Highland to be awarded £19.6 million over 10 years from the UK Government Pride in Place programme (PiPP). The aim is to build stronger communities, create thriving places and empower people to take back control. Co-Chairs Frances Gunn MBE & Ian Ross OBE have been appointed and currently the Sutherland Neighbourhood Board is being recruited from within the community.

The programme is:

- **Long-term**: providing certainty and security of funding over 10 years
- **Flexible**: allowing communities to spend their funding on the projects that matter most to them, in a way that works for them
- **Community-led**: putting local people at the heart of decision-making, with residents having their say on the future of their neighbourhood
- **Supportive**: empowering people to build the skills and confidence they need to deliver change in their communities



PRIDE IN PLACE
LED BY YOU – BACKED BY UK GOVERNMENT

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

At the Development Trust Learning Event in Lairg Highlands and Islands Enterprise brought together around 20 community development trusts, funders, support organisations and advisers from across Caithness and Sutherland to share experiences, strengthen partnerships and explore solutions to key community challenges. Development trusts were recognised for their vital role in supporting rural communities through job creation, tackling inequalities, delivering local services, developing community-led housing, managing assets and creating economic opportunities. The event was designed to help trusts build capacity, access support and investment, and collaborate more effectively in responding to local priorities.



Sessions focused on some of the most pressing issues facing rural communities, including housing, digital technology and community planning. Participants explored approaches to addressing local housing needs, considered how digital tools and AI can improve efficiency and decision-making, and examined the role of development trusts in delivering local and regional priorities. A panel of support agencies provided practical advice on funding and project development opportunities. The importance of development trusts in shaping resilient, sustainable communities and has led to plans for continued support through regular networking and learning events in 2027.

Whole Family Wellbeing Programme - Locality Partnerships E-Notice Board

The whole Family Wellbeing Programme team have developed a regional digital hub with Locality Padlets that provide a routemap to supporting holistic family services across the 9 Highland Community Planning Partnership areas.

- Inverness, Ardersier & Glenurquhart
- Badenoch & Strathspey
- Caithness
- Easter Ross
- Lochaber
- Mid-Ross
- Nairn & Nairnshire
- Skye, Lochalsh & Wester Ross
- Sutherland

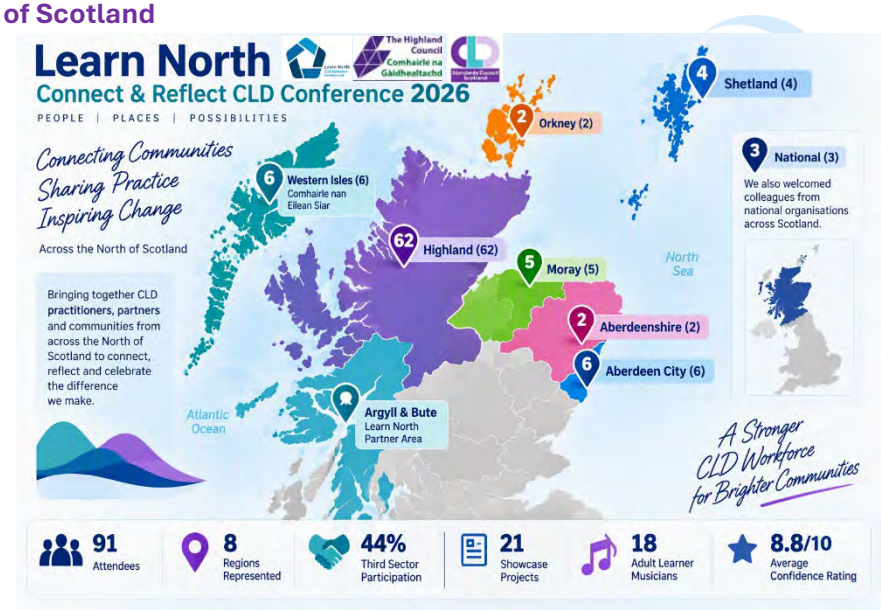


CLD Priority 6: Aligning Partnership Practices

Outcome: Improved partnership working through shared workforce development

CLD in practice – spotlight on Learn North Professional Learning Alliance for the North of Scotland

The Connect & Reflect CLD Conference in the Town House Inverness in March 2026 aimed to raise the profile of the CLD Standards Council and bring CLD Practitioners together from across the North of Scottish and islands to share good practice. A total of 91 attendees from across the Learn North CLD Partnership area included practitioners, managers, musicians, Gaelic singers and workshop facilitators from Highland, Moray, Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Orkney, Shetland, Western Isles and national organisations. This demonstrated regional reach, rural and island inclusion, public and third sector partnership working, workforce development impact, learner and practitioner engagement and Learn North's strategic role in connecting the North of Scotland. Throughout the day Gaelic language and culture was embedded from the Western Isles welcome, and Gaelic Awareness & language workshop, to the mass Gaelic lesson from Brian ÓhEadhra and audience participation in Brochan Lom. The 24-page Conference Brochure highlights the 20-minute Taster sessions and Showcase of CLD Practice displayed on 21 glossy A2 posters displayed in the Grand Hall.



The Keynote address from Ross Martin, CLD Standards Council was followed by lived experience presentations by Lucy Campbell (Flip of the Coin), Mya (African, Caribbean, Asian & Mixed Heritage Association) and Kate from Aban Outdoor. The lunchtime recital from 18 Adult Learners from Fèis Rois was delightful as delegates enjoyed upbuilding conversation aimed at reducing social and professional isolation, growing the CLD learning culture by building trust, networking and sharing

CLD practice that was a celebration of staff and volunteer achievements. Please take an opportunity to read and listen to the music and Gaelic songs in the Learn North CLD Workforce Development Report 2026 which includes the 2 Professional Learning courses funded by CLD Standards Council grant.

CLD Standards Council – Reflective Practice Professional Learning

The Reflective Practice professional learning offer attracted 19 participants from across Learn North areas who participated in 10 modules with reading materials, videos, quizzes, activities & forum posts. CLD Practitioners are required to be critically reflective in their professional CLD practice and this is core to our CLD practitioner competences and CLD values.

Effective CLD Partnerships – An understanding of shared decision making in CLD Partnerships

The Effective CLD Partnerships Learning Report 2026 developed from the 2 online sessions facilitated by SCDC demonstrated strong regional engagement from practitioners and managers across seven Learn North areas with 24 participants engaging across the North of Scotland. Practitioners increased confidence and understanding of shared decision making in CLD Partnerships and recognised the challenges faced are systemic rather local. Short-term funding, workforce instability, inconsistent understanding of CLD, and fragmented partnership arrangements undermine sustainability and impact. However, there remains a highly committed workforce with a clear appetite for stronger collaboration, clearer structures and increased investment in CLD.

Measures of impact	Evidence of impact	BRAG
Practitioners achieve CLD Standards Council values and competencies	**Creating CLD Career Pathways – The issue and Plan of Action** For several years, the number of job applicants for Adult Learning and Youth Work vacancies who hold existing CLD qualifications have been decreasing in number. This has led to a reduction in the percentage of employed staff with CLD qualifications in Highland Council CLD delivery teams. In the Adult Learning team, the previous capacity to run a Level 6 SCQF Supporting Adult Literacies Learning Award was no longer viable as this award was being phased out. In the Youth team, informal training along with mentoring and support was being given to new staff, but it was felt that a formal accredited programme should also be available. This led to discussions on how this was achievable and was an opportune time to explore SQA awards available to meet our staff training and workforce development needs. Staff and Managers were consulted on how these issues could be best resolved. One Staff member suggestion pointed to the need for a Level 6 SCQF Award in Youth Work. Adult service managers suggested that there was a significant and growing community need for a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages Award, with a lack of qualified job applicants for vacant roles. There was also a clear need to apply for a replacement of the now discontinued Tutoring Award. It was unanimously agreed that all Staff Awards should ideally be at the same SCQF Level to ensure standardisation of learning and teaching.	

CLD Career Pathways Opportunities

In April 2025, the Highland Council's Adult Learning and Youth Service received CLD Standards Council developmental approval for 3 in-house SCQF Level 6 qualifications.

The three courses available are as follows:

- ✓ National Progression Award (NPA) Theory and approaches to Youth Work (SCQF Level 6)
- ✓ Professional Development Award (PDA) Introduction to Tutoring ESOL (SCQF Level 6)
- ✓ Professional Development Award (PDA) Adult Learning in Scotland: An Introduction (SCQF Level 6)

Grow our Own Staff and Volunteers

The CLD Standards Council endorsement of 3 Highland Council qualifications offers an opportunity for people to begin a career in CLD, to develop and 'grow our own' workforce across Highland, opening a pathway towards a professional CLD qualification. It is hoped that this opportunity builds on and strengthens the work of CLD in Highland and the essential role that CLD practitioners contribute across our Highland communities.

Developing a definitive staff and volunteer training pathway would have the following impacts:

- Ensure new staff were trained to a professional level,
- Existing staff would gain greater opportunities for ongoing continuous professional development (CPD)
- Create a standardised approach and strong foundation for the wider workforce
- Contribute to retention and progression in Highland
- Learners would have effective and engaging learning experiences
- We would ensure standardisation of delivery

Impact of Grow Our Own CLD Workforce

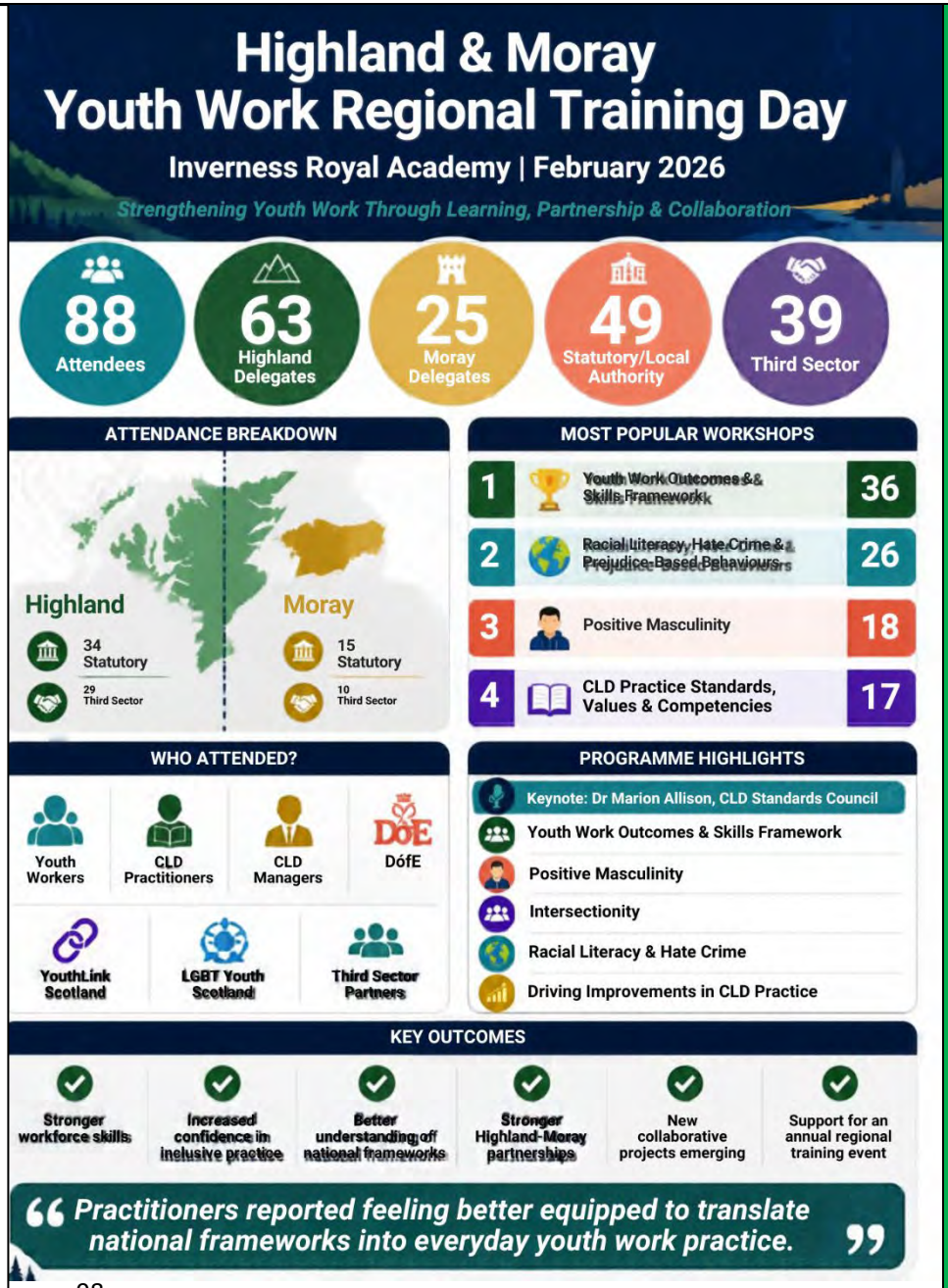
1. Highland Council is the only local authority in Scotland with CLDSC Developmental Approval for its suite of Awards.
2. Highland Council is the only organisation in Scotland offering and delivering 2 awards that have developmental approval - NPA in Theory and Approaches to Youth Work & PDA introduction to tutoring ITESOL
3. From 01/02/2024 – 01/09/2026: 43 full awards plus an additional 10 modules have been completed (98 units). Of these 39 Awards and 8 modules (84 units) are CLDSC developmentally approved.
4. The first ITESOL course delivered in Highland in more than a decade, a significant and ongoing addition to the ESOL workforce, a specialism within Highland's complex workforce context.
5. Staff and volunteers – have reported increased confidence in their own practice within communities and in the support available to them as individuals.
6. Across our workforce, 4 existing staff have enrolled onto the University of Highlands & Islands CLD course since it commenced

7. Staff and volunteers - have a clearer, supported, professional development and learning pathway, with progress reviewed at 6 monthly ERD's.
8. Staff and volunteers - have increased opportunities for in-house, accessible learning, predominantly cost free.
9. Learners - gain the best possible experience and outcomes from CLD professionally qualified staff and volunteers.
10. Multiple services and partners are now working together more closely, developing links, practice, and resource sharing.
11. Standardisation in delivery is assured across the services and throughout Highlands.
12. Professional development is increasingly encouraged and promoted within the services.
13. The Highland Council Lifelong Learning Centre can use the CLDSC Developmental Approval logo on promotional materials. This ensures that partners, learners and others recognise that our staff and services are part of and committed to a learning culture and our awards and delivery are quality assured by the professional body as meeting standards



References:

- CLDSC Approvals Report: CLDSC 2025 Highland Council Approval Official Report.docx
- Youth Link National Youth Work Induction Checklist – Induction Checklist
- Qual. Scot. Adult Learning Approval report: Qualification Approval Report
- SQA TESOL Approval Report: Qualification Approval Report
- Qual. Scot Youth Work Approval Report: Qualification Approval Report
- Qual. Scot. Prior Verification Approvals: PV Accepted Certificate - PVUK-2024-2719

Practitioners achieve professional learning and qualifications	**Highland & Moray Youth Work Regional Training Day** There were 88 attendees at the excellent Highland & Moray Youth Work Regional Training Day in February at Inverness Royal Academy. The day strengthen youth work through learning, partnership and collaboration. 63 staff and volunteers were from Highland and 25 from Moray with 39 from Third sector and 49 statutory/local authority. The programme for the day was designed collaboratively by colleagues from both councils and the third sector. Presentations included a keynote speech by Dr Marion Allison, Director of CLD Standards Council, The Highland Council Children and Young People's Participation Strategy and Moray Council CLD Worker (Employability) – Summer Programme. Workshops covered topics: • National Youth Work Outcome and Skills • Framework Positive Masculinity • Racial Literacy and an Introduction to Intersectionality • Driving Improvements in CLD Practice. CLD practitioners and volunteers from Highland and Moray had a great experience and have asked for more of this type of training in the future.	Highland & Moray Youth Work Regional Training Day Inverness Royal Academy | February 2026 Strengthening Youth Work Through Learning, Partnership & Collaboration 88 Attendees 63 Highland Delegates 25 Moray Delegates 49 Statutory/Local Authority 39 Third Sector ATTENDANCE BREAKDOWN Highland 34 Statutory 29 Third Sector Moray 15 Statutory 10 Third Sector MOST POPULAR WORKSHOPS 1 Youth Work Outcomes && Skills Framework 36 2 Racial Literacy, Hate Crime & Prejudice-Based Behaviours 26 3 Positive Masculinity 18 4 CLD Practice Standards, Values & Competencies 17 WHO ATTENDED? Youth Workers CLD Practitioners CLD Managers DofE YouthLink Scotland LGBT Youth Scotland Third Sector Partners PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS Keynote: Dr Marion Allison, CLD Standards Council Youth Work Outcomes & Skills Framework Positive Masculinity Intersectionity Racial Literacy & Hate Crime Driving Improvements in CLD Practice KEY OUTCOMES Stronger workforce skills Increased confidence in inclusive practice Better understanding of national frameworks Stronger Highland-Moray partnerships New collaborative projects emerging Support for an annual regional training event "Practitioners reported feeling better equipped to translate national frameworks into everyday youth work practice."



CLD Priority 7: Climate and Social Justice

Outcome: Increased knowledge and understanding of the impact of climate change on marginalised and/or disadvantaged communities

CLD in practice – spotlight on Climate and Social Justice Countryside Rangers



Impact Analysis

The Countryside Rangers Annual report 2025-26 Impact Analysis shows how the Countryside Rangers service improves lives in Highland. 96% of customers report that their life is better for them in the following ways:

- ✓ 95% Learning New Things
- ✓ 85% Connecting with Nature
- ✓ 74% Meeting New People
- ✓ 62% Making a positive difference for nature
- ✓ 64% Feeling part of a community
- ✓ 64% Encouraging Physical Activity
- ✓ 61% Improving Mental Wellbeing

"Seed planting, at Thurso Library: Great activity for young and old alike. Teaching children how food is grown and how to look after it. Thank you"

Number of CLD Engagements in 2024-25

Type of Engagement	2024-25	2025-26	Increase
No. of CLD Engagements	8,109	12,746	57.18%

Countryside Rangers community-based learning CLD service:

- ✓ Northern Pilgrims Way Project 2025/26 – including 2 Adult Learning walks engaging in the cultural heritage of Caithness
- ✓ Animal Homes Project 2025/26 – practical hands-on learning with wood workshops to help nature
- ✓ Highland Refugees Green/Blue Health Project – partnership with HC Adult Learning Resettlement Programme (ARAP)
- ✓ Pollinator report 2025
- ✓ Biodiversity conference March 2026

Growing from Green Libraries to Cultivating Climate Champions - Countryside Rangers

The successful collaboration with the Green Libraries project in 2024-25 led to the establishment of Nature Clubs, seed libraries, nature book collection, community gardens, flowers and vegetables, tree planting, climate & environmental engagement programmes, plant swap, nature activities & workshops. In 2025-26 HLH Libraries has received £32,000 from the SLIC for 10 Highland Libraries to Cultivate Climate Champions in 12 months of activities with Countryside Rangers, library staff, schools and communities.

The team has expanded to be inclusive for those unable to attend in person, the "Nature Unveiled" blog and online talks provided opportunities to learn, stay connected and remain part of a wider community through digital. Customer feedback reflects the Five Ways to Wellbeing - activities help people connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and give back through volunteering and conservation projects.

Measures of impact	Evidence of impact	BRAG

Learners and practitioners have increased knowledge and understanding of climate change and living sustainably for a better world	Highland Council Adult Learning Services have delivered 43 climate awareness activities: Species on the Edge, Climate Hubs, Outreach Climate Hubs, Community Gardens, Recycling Workshops, Eco Crafts & Carbon **Blue and Green Spaces** The Blue and Green Spaces work formed part of the Adult Learning/ESOL Summer Programme for Afghan adult learners. The idea for this strand of work came from the needs analysis carried out with the Afghan adult learner groups, particularly in relation to trauma-informed practice, wellbeing, cultural needs and opportunities for families to connect and integrate through outdoor learning and build a sense of belonging in the Highlands. The project idea, project plan and funding application was done via Julia the Funding Officer to support this trauma-informed outdoor learning. This approach built on similar work developed previously with the Syrian families through the resettlement programme in 2022 and subsequently with Afghan families across 2023, 2024 and 2025.  Each year, partners are invited to collaborate and deliver on the project - Nature 4 Health, Aban Outdoor, HLH Rangers, yoga and Highland Dance School instructors etc. The most recent funding was subsequently managed financially by Imogen because Highland Council was unable to hold the funding directly, but the original idea, needs analysis, project development and funding application came from within capacity as an AL Coordinator for the Afghan Adults on the ARAP Scheme. The reports were submitted to HTSI, and they were used by Countryside Rangers to collate the report with photos provided. **ESOL ARAP Summer Programme - education, recreation and wellbeing activities** The Adult Learning ESOL ARAP Summer Programme offers a range of educational, recreational and wellbeing activities designed to promote local orientation, language development, and community integration. Planned activities include: • **Summer ESOL classes** focusing on specific learning goals, including Driving Theory preparation, Digital Skills, conversation practice and language games for both men and women. • **Family visits to accessible local parks**, including Walker Park, Bellfield Park, Whin Park and Inverness Botanic Gardens, helping families become familiar with safe local green spaces and encouraging independent visits. • **Three family coach trips** organised by Adult Learning:	

- **Abriachan forest**
- **Landmark forest adventure park**
- **Ardersier common nature reserve**

Support for families to access **High Life Highland's "School's Out**" programme, offering free summer activities for primary school children through the Summer of Sports HLH funding. Parents received guidance and assistance with registration, enabling children from Raigmore families to participate in activities at Raigmore Community Centre.

Participation in "**Home in the Hills",** a hill-walking programme for diverse communities across Inverness, funded by the HTSI Wellbeing Fund. The programme offers beginner and intermediate walks, with transport provided. Several Afghan men and women enrolled in May and continue to participate throughout the summer.

CLD Practitioners Network – Challenge Poverty Week

The CLD Practitioners Network launched during **Challenge Poverty Week October 2025** in the Treehouse, Merkinch on the theme of CLD addressing Poverty, Climate and Social Justice with 36 CLD practitioners from the public and third sector. A presentation by the Highland Council's Community Development Team on Child Poverty Reduction reported concerning facts about Child Poverty in Highland, which have been reiterated in the published NHS Highland Public Health Annual Report 2025

- Of the 12,834 children aged under 5 in NHS Highland in 2024, more than one in five (21.9%) live in relative poverty, a figure that has not improved since 2010.
- One in three children live in a remote or rural area, with around half of all NHS Highland children living in the most access-deprived 20% of areas in Scotland.
- The data reveals stark health inequalities linked to deprivation.

The Highland Adult Learning Delivery Group discussed Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Development in the comfy couches, then New Start Highland CEO James Dunbar presented on 25 Years of Creating Positive Change through the social enterprise core purpose focusing on sustainability, climate change and social justice. ILM Highland spoke about Practical Action for a Fairer Future with employment that helps people, place and planet.



The highlight was the Developing Young Leaders for Sustainable Communities group of young people from the Highland Youth Parliament Climate who took part in a focus group with the Climate Change team, H&I Climate Hub, Change Mental Health and Youth Workers. The 4 HYP members expressed their concerns on the impact of climate change and people's behaviours on the planet.

James is a member of the Highland Poverty & Equality Commission and asked the group, "**How can we collectively become more linked to improve partnership working?"** He later invited the HYP members to visit New Start Highland site in Carsegate and took part in the HMIE revisit in February 2026 where he spoke about improved partnership working with the Highland Council.

The Climate Change team joined the HYP Exec meeting the following month and discussed an opportunity to represent the voice of young people on the Highland Council's Climate Change Committee in January 2026. The CLD Practitioners Network delivered a Christmas event with a CLD/E presentation from Anna Templeton, Storytelling Circles and Christmas star craft workshop from Adult Learning Leader Nadiia. The CLD Practitioners coordinator is also the Chair of Learn North CLD Professional Learning Alliance and coordinated the Connect & Reflect CLD Conference in March with colleagues from Learn North.

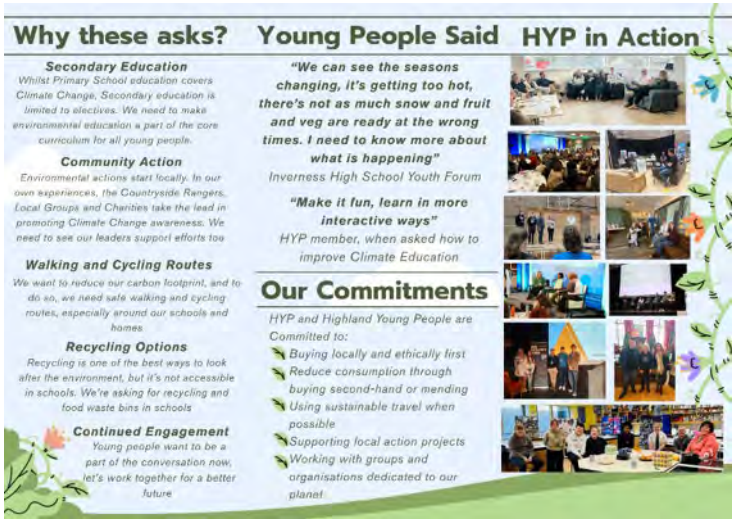
Highland Youth Parliament - Climate Change Committee Presentation

HYP worked over a number of months this year with the HC Climate Change team and Representatives of the Highland Youth Parliament and the Highland Youth Convener gave a presentation to the Climate Change Committee on 28 January 2026 outlining their climate change priorities and providing youth perspectives on areas for urgent action and opportunities for meaningful engagement in shaping Highland's journey to Net Zero and climate resilience. They also shared the leaflet attached. There were four asks of the Committee, which it was believed were achievable, as follows:-

- **Improvement in Secondary Education** – make climate change education a part of the core curriculum
- **Walking and Cycling Routes** – have more & safer ways to get to school and around local communities, not cars/buses
- **Community Actions** – promote green initiatives, like litter picking or upcycling, in local communities

- **Create more recycling options in schools** – improve the recycling infrastructure in schools to support everyday climate action





Climate Change Committee Presentation and Canva report by HYP

The report presented by the Highland Youth Convenor and Chairperson of the HYP is attached below in Canva and PPT slide. A webcasting recording of the Climate Change Committee of 28 January 2026 and FaceBook reel are below.

https://www.canva.com/design/DAHIaEEZXC4/gV8cri3c5_AKToPUeSuoJA/view?utm_content=DAHIaE%E2%80%A6%20target=#1

HYP Climate Change Committee (renewed).pptx

Climate Change Committee - 28 January 2026 - Wednesday 28 January 2026, 2:00pm - Highland Council Webcasting

https://www.facebook.com/reel/962433439539645

Extract from the Climate Change Committee Minutes of 28 January 2026

The Committee

NOTED the presentation; and

AGREED TO RECOMMEND to the Council that officers work with Members and representatives of the Highland Youth Parliament to progress the four asks of the Climate Change Committee as set out in the presentation

At the Full council meeting on 26 March 2026 the Council AGREED:- ii. embedding the voice of young people within the Council's approach to climate change, energy and community resilience, recognising the long-term impact of these decisions on future generations, and to develop mechanisms to ensure that youth perspectives were reflected in policy development, investment planning and programme delivery;

BrightMinds Community Litter Pick

Young people in the BrightMinds youth club headed outdoors to make the most of the evening sunshine with a community litter pick. Provided with gloves and litter pickers from Nevis Landscape Partnership, the young people headed down to the shorefront near the yacht club and collected an incredible 7 bags of litter along the way!



Thanks to the hard work of the young people the area is now looking lovely and tidy again. Many of the group were genuinely surprised by how many beer cans and bottles they found, and it was a powerful reminder of why caring for our local environment matters so much.

Lochaber Archive Centre make memories with young people who gain Youth Scotland Hi-5 Awards

High Life Highland Archivist, Rory Green from Lochaber Archive Centre, delivered a three-week summer programme for the BrightMinds young people helping them to learn all about Fort William and the rich history of the town.

📷 **Week 1** – The young people walked along the local High Street where they took photographs using disposable cameras. The aim is to print the photos and lodged them with the Lochaber Archive Centre, then look back on these photos when they are older.

📚 **Week 2** -The young people toured the Archive Centre, where they got to see the rooms that preserve local history with old police records and historical photographs. They also made memory boxes as a special place to keep treasured items and memories for years to come.

🎉 **Week 3** - The young people got their photographs back and loved looking through them, sharing their favourite images, and telling the stories behind each one and why it was meaningful to them.

As part of the Archive project, they also completed a Youth Scotland Hi-5 Award and every child who took part will be receiving their certificate very soon. To celebrate, they took one final walk along the High Street and visited Nevis Bakery to enjoy some delicious locally baked treats where they found out that Nevis Bakery has been part of Fort William since 1980 🍰
Grateful thanks to the enthusiastic staff and volunteers at Lochaber Archive Centre where they have helped to create memories that will last a lifetime!






Nevis Landscape Partnership – Young Rangers Outdoor Skills for Life Programme

	Nevis Landscape Partnership is recruiting for the Young Rangers Outdoor Skills for Life training programme funded by the Highland Council Community Regeneration Fund. Young people aged 16-25 years in Glen Nevis are signing up for free training and a new adventure this autumn to learn what it is like to be a Ranger and develop new skills in conservation work.  From wildlife monitoring and path maintenance to invasive species removal, bushcraft and navigation, there are lots of opportunities to build confidence, gain recognised qualifications and experience what it's like to work in an incredible landscape. **ILM Highland (Alness)** Most households have unwanted electricals at home and ILM Highland are educating people on the different ways to recycle them responsibly. If it has a plug, cable or battery, ILM Highland can help people in Highland to find the right route for it, whether it's a kettle that's stopped working or a larger household appliance.  🚙 Bring items to one of ILM's community collection days 🩷 Use one of ILM's pink bins for smaller household electricals ♻️ Take electricals to your local Highland Council recycling centre 💚 Use dedicated reuse containers for suitable working appliances at Nairn, Inverness, Wick and Thurso recycling centres 🏠 Book a HomeClear collection for appliances you need collected from home 📍 Drop domestic electrical items directly into ILM Highland in Alness Wherever possible, suitable items are identified for reuse, while those that have reached the end of their useful life are recycled responsibly so valuable materials can be recovered and kept in circulation.	
Learners and practitioners have increased knowledge	**Social Enterprise Academy** Sustainability is a key concern for third sector organisations and social enterprises. Numerous challenges face the sector, both within their own structure and how they interact in the wider environment. Sustainability is also about how to expand, scale and develop the ways organisations are working and growing. The Social Enterprise Academy Summer Residential Programme 2026 at Dundreggan was funded by The National Lottery Environment fund and explores these themes, looking at what is already working,	

and understanding of how climate change impacts on disadvantaged communities	how to sustain this, and identifying what needs to change and how to make this happen. The seven-day programme for Social Enterprises and Not For Profit organisations to examine and develop their organisational and financial sustainability.13 participants took part in the Residential at Dundreggan and for the majority, it exceeded expectations. "I have learned about making the most of our assets and not being afraid to look at monetising our activities and offerings to help us be less reliable on grant funding" "I'm more confident in all aspects of sustainability" "I have a much fuller understanding of sustainability, particularly around diversifying income and working together with our team and board to make changes" **Transition Black Isle** organises the monthly community markets at village halls in the Black Isle, including North Kessock Community Market, Cromarty Community Market and Munlochy Community Market Centre where they help local residents to press surplus apples into lovely fresh juice. Take a clean container to take it home with you and pick up some local honey.    **Hub X** is a safe space at **Café Artysans** at Calman Trust where in partnership with Moniack Mhor Writers' Centre and Abriachan Forest Trust is for 15-19 year olds , for film making, pottery, creative writing and woodcraft and funded by Cash Back for Communities  **Ullapool Sea Savers** Normally you will find the Ullapool Sea Savers down at the big rip tides helping Seawilding deploy oyster shells and creating new reefs of incredible native oysters as part of the Native Oyster Reintroduction project (Nature Restoration Fund), but they were also down at Ullapool Unpacked Zero Waste shop where they're involved in Youth Highland's new Bright Ideas project with Steven McGourlay Media in Ullapool.

Lairg & District Learning Centre - Climate Festival

Lairg & District Learning Centre hosted a fermentation evening for the Climate Festival 2026, funded by Highlands & Islands Climate Hub. It was wonderful to see everyone using local produce and getting hands-on, with plenty of inspiring climate conversations and growing tips shared throughout the night.







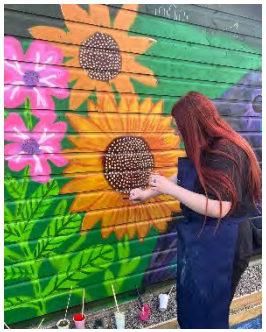
Funding from the **Highland Council's Reuse & Repair fund** has enabled Lairg & District Learning Centre to run Make Do & Mend drop-in session with helpful hints and tips for hemming jeans and adding zips to jackets and cushions.

LDLC are encouraging people to get out their old sewing machines, give them an oil and clean, and make them purr again https://www.facebook.com/reel/1868943821183629

Flip of the Coin - Learning practical skills with food growing and reducing waste

Flip of the Coin in Alness is reaping the benefits of growing their own food in their polytunnel at the Flipside. The **Art of Wellbeing** and **Growing Connections** projects were full of colour as they emptied the polytunnel and removed winter veg while painting murals on the hut and catching up with friends. They also teach people to grow their own vegetables, swap seeds and operate off grid from electricity and water, thus contributing to the circular economy.



Listen to BBC Sounds *Aithris Na Maidne* https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m003139v (listen from 27 mins 18 secs) interview with Lucy Campbell, CEO Fip of the Coin as she speaks about the benefits of receiving funding from the **Highland Council Reuse and Repair Fund.**

The fund gives them the opportunity to repurpose the artists in the community by upcycling furniture at the Centre for Creative Wellbeing. Lucy travels around Easter Ross looking for items of furniture that the artists see beauty in and later sell on their Etsy site after they have been upcycled. The community is learning how to prep, paint, repair, transform and experiment with upcycling as they meet new people, have a cuppa and enjoy making something with their own hands. The Second Life Studio is about learning practical skills, reducing waste and discovering what you can create when you're given the space to have a go.



Developing the Young Workforce in Camster, Wick

Developing the Young Workforce and Wick High School Geography and Environmental Science pupils headed to Camster to meet with Kirsty from The Flow Country Partnership, Jacqueline from Royal Highland Education Trust RHET Highland and Peter from Camster Peatland Regeneration. Following on from a classroom talk which took place earlier in the week, pupils arrived at the site at Camster on Friday to put their knowledge into practice. They used GPS devices to navigate the area, and recorded the depth of the peat, while also identify various species of moss and wildlife in the area around them. Pupils learned about the importance of restoring and maintaining the peatlands, the environmental impacts, and how this important work is carried out by those working in conservation roles. The young people found a Fox Moth Caterpillar which is becoming more numerous on the restored bog.





Brora Learning Zone - Species on the Edge Project

Species on the Edge is the main theme for Brora Learning Zone's in-house social enterprise programme from Autumn 2025 – July 2026. They worked closely with the Species on the Edge East Coast Scotland Project Officer to create an informative art exhibition, two small butterfly/bee gardens and merchandise which helps raise awareness of 18 of the Highland based coastal species which are under threat.

Each of the learners chose two main species to investigate and champion. This was done by researching photographs and sifting through background information using books from the Brora Gallery Library, mobile phones, I-pads or computers. In addition to this The Species on the Edge officer gave a very informative talk to the group on their work in the Highlands and showed the group moths caught in moth trap a few hours before the talk which were released back into the outdoors after they had been identified with the group. A few of the group made site visits to an area where the small blue and dingy skipper butterflies are found.

The results of all the fact-finding work were condensed into fact cards and reference material for the showcase, artwork for greetings cards, creative writing or merchandise packaging. We also helped to make designs for tote bags for the Species on The Edge Small Blue Butterfly conference in May 2026 and a series of mugs as part of an employability project with Lairg Learning Centre and Golspie High School

Three different local artists were invited to visit the group at the centre to help generate ideas for artwork – Julie Ann Fullerton who introduced us to Brusho techniques and stencilling; Sally Purdy mosaic artist; Lynn O'Neill for lino printing. Storyteller Sally Nichols joined the Brora Learning Zone co-ordinator in creating a story colouring book on The Northern Brown Argus butterfly as part of a family story workshop session at Lairg's Family Learning Butterfly Day. The latter was designed to link in with the current National Year of Reading workshops.







It was agreed that part of the profits from the merchandise was used for developing bee and butterfly gardens at Brora Learning Zone (created by three of the Learners at Brora) and the beginnings of a bee and butterfly garden area at Lairg Learning Centre. The end Showcase in July took place during Brora Gala Week and was attended by over 60 people with talks, activities and an informative exhibition.









The Otters Couch, The Alchemist and Historylinks will be stocking some of the merchandise in the future, 200 copies of Camilla the Caterpillar story colouring book have been printed for young readers by Species on the Edge funds and some of the butterfly artwork by learners was used to help create a butterfly site board at Balchraggan Wood, which is one of the local sites for finding the rare Small blue and Dingy skipper butterflies. In October autumn we hope to be able to join other SOE volunteers in a conservation day at Balchraggan Wood.

Wellbeing benefits of conservation

As well as the conservation aspect to this project this was very much a health and wellbeing venture aimed at reconnecting people back to nature, with many of the learners being supported by and referred through the local NHS mental health team, Enable Works, Skills Development Scotland, TYKES or other local referral agencies. As well as the therapeutic creative aspects of the work, learners had the chance to benefit from working outdoors in the garden area, visiting Balchraggan Wood butterfly site, taking part in nature walks or even be inspired to develop their own butterfly bee garden areas at home.



Adult Achievement Awards

- ✓ Some in the group used the project as part of their **adult achievement awards** or **Core Skills Working with Others** qualifications.
- ✓ A total of **34 people took part in** this project including **19 core social enterprise learners**.
- ✓ Over **60 pieces of artwork** were on show, along with a wide variety of merchandise.

Outcomes

- ✓ Increased awareness of endangered species in the North of Scotland , factors affecting them and ways we can help from both learners on the project and visitors to the exhibition day
- ✓ Increased confidence in study skills and core skills including digital skills through internet research, talks, digital photography and word processing tasks,
- ✓ Problem solving skills by finding ways to depict information and create an exhibition. Good communication and working with others develops skills by working in small groups and as a team to achieve tasks and materials for the showcase.



- ✓ Several of the group had to help with preparing for the showcase event beforehand and on the day
- ✓ Seven learners have used the project to help achieve adult achievement awards or core skills qualifications
- ✓ We have created a butterfly and bee garden at Brora Learning Zone which is already attracting new butterflies and bees to the garden.
- ✓ We are in the process of raising funds through selling merchandise which will help buy new seeds and plants for creating a small bee butterfly area at Lairg Learning Centre's garden next season.

High Life Highland Libraries Cultivating Climate Champions

High Life Highland Libraries Cultivating Climate Champions 2025-26 project is funded by Scottish Libraries and Information Council (SLIC) Fund and received a £32,000 investment from the Public Library Improvement Fund, administered by the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) on behalf of the Scottish Government. Supporting Cultivating Climate Champions is a climate engagement initiative across 10 Highland libraries (including Fort William, Ullapool, Culloden, Dingwall, Gairloch, Thurso, Wick, Fortrose, Smithton, and Balloch).



During October and November, Sarah James-Gaukroger, the Highland Clothes Doctor, will provide free drop-in sessions and learn practical mending skills to help your clothes last longer. Sarah is an award-winning clothier and maker with a lifelong passion for fashion, vintage upcycling and make-do-and-mend. She brings years of experience, creativity and expert advice to every session.



If you have a favourite garment that needs a repair, a refresh or a new lease of life then just bring your clothing questions and the garments that need a little TLC to one of these libraries: Fort William Library (23 Oct), Ullapool Library (30 Oct), Thurso Library (6 Nov), Dingwall Library (13 Nov) and Culloden Library (20 Nov). The 2026/27 SLIC Fund will award High Life Highland Libraries for their Words of Welcome: Enhancing High Life Highland's Library Services for New Scots.

The Ardnamurchan Outdoor ASN Learning Programme

The Ardnamurchan Outdoor ASN Learning Programme demonstrates how long-term outdoor learning and youth work approaches can successfully support the personal, social, emotional and educational development of young people with additional support needs. The outdoor programme has entered its third year and provides consistent weekly outdoor learning sessions for young people with additional support needs. It offers an alternative, informal learning environment within the Strontian Community Woodland and is delivered by Ardnamurchan YDO in partnership with Lochaber Countryside Rangers and Ardnamurchan High School. Originally established and funded as a Community Regeneration-funded Art and Nature project, the programme combines youth work and outdoor learning approaches to support engagement, wellbeing, and personal development. Young people with ASN take part in a wide range of activities including outdoor cooking, shelter building, wildlife identification, environmental surveys, nature-based arts, camera trapping, and conservation projects such as bug hotel construction.

Two of the young people, Ailsa and Alasdair (pictured with a bug hotel) have demonstrated exceptional commitment, attending regularly over the past two years and achieving Dynamic Youth Awards in recognition of their involvement. Both young people have reported increased confidence, improved wellbeing, enhanced knowledge of nature, and greater ability to express themselves. They have also engaged in wider youth participation opportunities, including attending the Highland Youth Parliament for the first time.



Ailsa said that the woodland setting provides a calm environment where she feels relaxed, gains confidence and can express her emotions. She thinks the programme is educational, exciting, and something she looks forward to each week.



The positive impact has also been recognised by school staff. The Depute Headteacher reported significant improvements in Alasdair's confidence, sense of belonging, emotional awareness, and willingness to discuss his feelings and learning. The programme has also supported the development of positive peer relationships and reduced social isolation. The Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Act 2026 received royal assent in February 2026 states that an education authority must, so far as reasonably practicable, provide or secure the provision of one course of residential outdoor education for 4 nights and 5 days to each pupil attending school.

Àban Outdoor

Àban Outdoor Adventure Weeks during Summer 2026 were a big hit with teenagers who would normally spend the holidays on their phone, in front of the TV or in bed. Instead, they spent it rock climbing, gorge walking, catching tadpoles, cooking and making friends as seen in this video https://youtu.be/k5jkluV6BcQ. The Adventure Weeks are aimed at developing confidence in young people, learning new skills and meeting friends, helping young people move towards positive destinations when they leave school. Àban Outdoor Impact Report 2025 states that 92% learned new skills, 95% developed positive social relationships and 68% now do activities in their own time.

"If it wasn't at the adventure week, I'd probably still be in bed"

"I learned that I can be stronger and more resilient than I ever thought I could be"

"probably one of the most scariest things I've done in my life"







Minecraft Sustainable Town Wick - presentation at Focus North Conference



At the Focus North Conference 2026 in Wick, Ollie & Jack from **Step Forward Wick Youth** presented to a room filled audience of business people and public agencies about the sustainable town they built using Minecraft Town. The young people were supported by their Youth Support Officers (Heather & Kaitlyn) to develop the Minecraft sustainable town and spoke clearly, handling questions with ease in front of adults. William MacGillvary from RDI Renewables praised them saying that "Getting up in front of us all was an achievement in itself, the Minecraft town and all the renewable infrastructure showed us all what a future township would look like. Keep that interest going and I hope your future careers bring your vision to reality". Watch Ollie & Jacke from 5hrs 15 mins) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZQfmE_6I6E.

Pupils at Wick High School and Thurso High School earned themselves their **Young Green Leader Award** with Wick presenting their sustainable town project.

Learning for Sustainable Futures course

University of Edinburgh and Learning for Sustainability Scotland (LfS) run free online courses delivered on Coursera which are a combination of self-paced independent learning and facilitated tutor sessions.

- Learning for Sustainable Futures: Supporting People, Practice and Policy (Scotland) starts on 2 November and runs for 13 weeks (up to 20 hours CPD)
- Learning for Sustainable Futures – is a self-led course which runs for 1 week (10 hours CPD).

- Critically reflect upon understandings of the range, scope and nature of 'sustainability'; and consider the role of personal values and frameworks.
- Explore the way in which systems, connections and factors such as intersectionality influence the impact of sustainability issues.
- Investigate how we might move towards action within our own 'spheres of influence'.
- Examine and reflect on teaching and learning approaches to sustainability (Optional)

What you will learn

Climate change, gender equality, biodiversity collapse, health, social equity, and inclusion are just some of the issues that concern us all, impacting human and planetary well-being and economic stability. How to live a sustainable life affects – and connects – everyone and everything.

