



ANNUAL REPORT

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Argyll & Bute Third Sector Interface

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Inveraray
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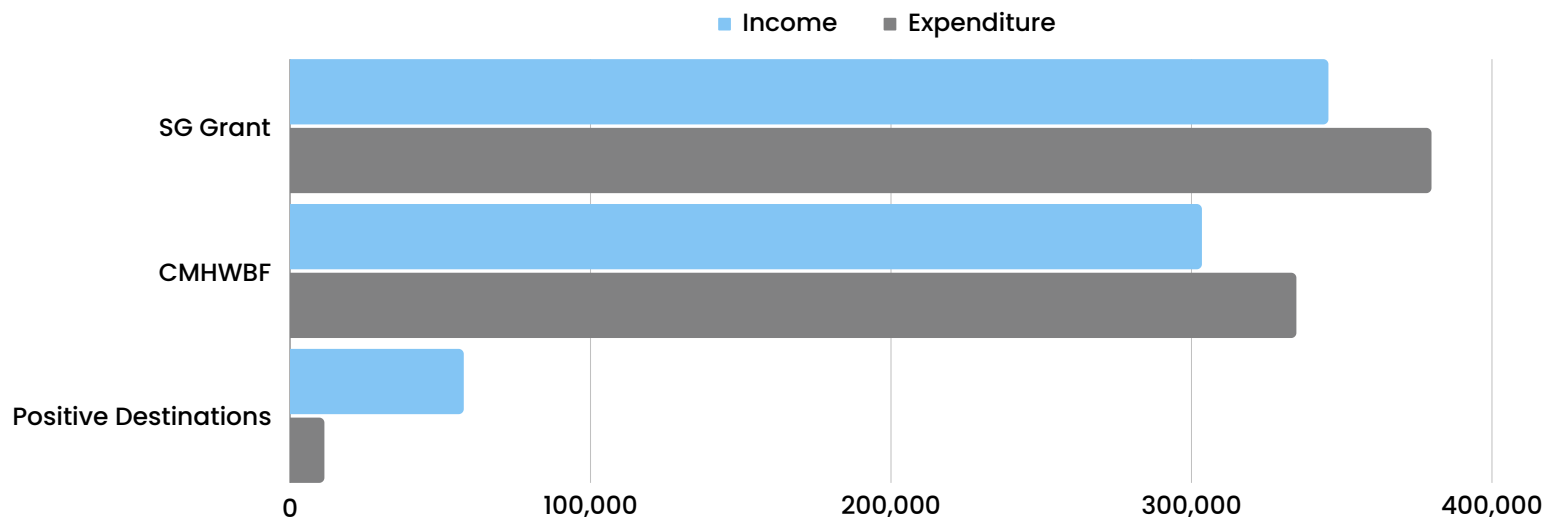


Year in review

The focus of activity for this past year has been to continue to help the third and social enterprise sector rebuild their capacity to deliver services after the hiatus caused by the pandemic. With the end of the 'stay at home' phase of the pandemic in May 2022 many organisations who had successfully transitioned to a hybrid model of online and/or in-person support have fully re-opened their services.

It has taken the best part of a year for some communities to resume pre-pandemic levels of activity as some vulnerable groups have been slower to return to face-to-face activity for understandable reasons. What has been noticeable however has been the level of volunteer fatigue as pandemic activity has given way to cost of living support with an increase in demand for some types of third sector and community support such as that provided by foodbanks, warm spaces and debt advice.

As predicted our focus was to make sure the Third Sector Interface was equipped to support the third and social enterprise sectors to weather the shocks that came from the recessionary environment, the cost-of-living crisis, the energy price rises and the war in Ukraine. We have therefore seen an increase in requests for funding advice and support for core costs from many organisations as some funders target their support at the cost-of-living crisis directly.



Statement From CEO

Takki Sulaiman

Key to activity for the year to 31 March 2023 has been the continuing development of TSI capacity to both directly support the sector and to advocate in a more evidence led manner to partners and at a national level. This led to the Board of Trustees agreeing to an investment programme to launch a new database and the completion of the development of a Community Directory, a new Inveraray Hub offering state of the art facilities for member organisations who wish to use hybrid meeting facilities and a refocused staffing structure centred around direct support to third sector organisations with the four Third Sector Support Advisers each covering one of the four administrative areas of Argyll and Bute containing approximately between 250 and 300 organisations and community groups.



As the challenges of Brexit, the continuing cost of living crisis, rising inflation and energy costs, public sector spending pressures and the war in Ukraine continue to be felt by communities it is essential that the TSI continues to support community groups prosper and thrive. In August 2023 our long-standing treasurer, John Stevens, sadly passed away. His commitment, passion and expertise will be greatly missed.

Statutory Partnerships

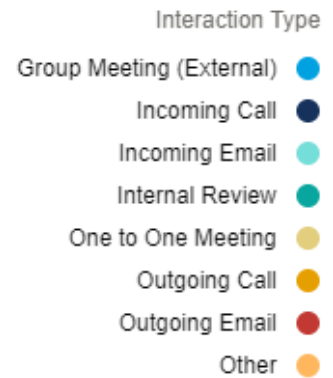
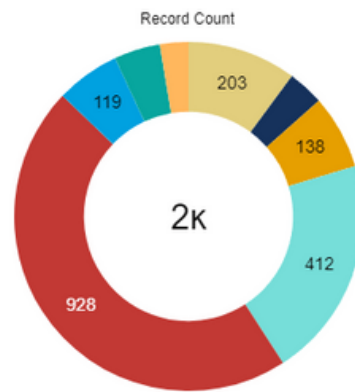
We have continued to play a strong role in advocating for third sector interests amongst statutory partners, via the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and the Community Planning Partnership (CPP), and as a result of this advocacy and partnership work there have been a considerable number of important new developments in 2022-2023 that will help support the resilience and strength of the third and social enterprise sectors in Argyll and Bute.

In partnership with the HSCP the TSI played an important role in supporting a transparent approach to commissioning which has enabled a co-productive approach to the design and delivery of health and social care services. The development of co-production approaches in Argyll and Bute continues and further developments on this will be reported for 2023-2024.

Achievements

Over 2,200 specific requests for support were received (2021- 2022: 900) and met for the year with requests ranging from funding advice to new project support to advice on policy development and governance.

A key tool to aid coordination of sectoral activity, facilitate cooperation and enable gap analysis was the launch of the Argyll and Bute Community Directory in September 2022 (www.abcd.scot).



The addition of 973 organisations to the database has involved a considerable amount of work from the entire TSI team and will transform how partners link in with the third sector. Funding was gratefully received from the HSCP. Usage has been excellent with over 890 unique users on the site from September 2022 to March 2023.

The database forms a key part of the TSI's strategy to map strengths and identify gaps across Argyll and Bute and we have been working with partners to ensure this becomes a rich resource of third sector intelligence and evidenced based policy making and commissioning.

Partnership working

Work with the local council, the HSCP, SDS, DWP and other partners and stakeholders is an essential part of our work so that our energies and resources can be coordinated, integrated, and targeted at those most in need.

The TSI has led the coordination of work on Community Wealth Building leading to the TSI commissioning a report, strategy, action plan and two business cases which will report to the Community Planning Partnership in December 2023.

The TSI is represented on numerous local bodies including the Locality Planning Groups, the CPP Management Committee, the Integration Joint Board, the Employability Partnership and the Community Learning and Development Partnership to name a few. This sector representation and advocacy role also includes chairing the CPP's Corporate Parenting Board. Nationally ABTSI plays a strong role in ensuring the voice of rural and island third sector and social enterprise organisations is heard, and the CEO has worked on the development of a Fairer Funding document on a working group for TSI Network Scotland with SCVO.

Communications, Events, Training and Development



Access to a new online learning platform has been purchased which contains over two hundred and fifty courses and is free to members. We have also refreshed our approach to thematic sector network events, such as the Social Enterprise and Adults networks, and have adopted a more democratic approach to agenda setting so that topics are current and are of interest to members. We have continued to improve our approach to communications, engagement and training. Thematic sector network events have been held with specific Children's, Social Enterprise and Adults networks, and we have adopted a more democratic approach to agenda setting so that topics are current and are of interest to members.

A total of 12 themed network events were held across the year. Training courses included co-production training, using evaluation, UNCRC, Cyber resilience, GDPR, brand and trustee training. Over 284 training courses were taken via our online platform and a series of local roadshows to support third sector groups in communities also commenced in February 2023 and will continue for the foreseeable future.

There were over 83 mailings sent out in the year with over 14,000 opens. Facebook continues to be our most used social media platform with over 243,000 post impressions.

We have also supported and hosted Scottish government consultation events on Ferries, Community Wealth Building, Older People's strategy and the National Care Service.



For 2023-2024 we will expand our work on supporting Social Enterprise including additional workshops and offering 1:1 coaching from established experts.

Work is currently ongoing on our website which will provide an excellent platform for information sharing, collaboration and will contain tools for self-evaluation and self-directed support. Launch is expected for January/February 2024.

Funding

Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund

Argyll and Bute TSI was pleased to have again played a key role in the delivery of the Scottish Government's Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund. The TSI took the lead in a local partner reference group that devised a funding programme to tackle mental health, poverty and social isolation and by February 2023 were able to have co-produced 57 applications for funding of which 38 were successful bringing in £282,000 into the local third sector economy to meet the needs of many vulnerable communities. The national evaluation programme has shown how across Scotland over 1400 grassroots organisations have used the funds effectively to support those experiencing mental ill health and social isolation.

We continue to work on ways of maximising awareness of and access to new sources of funding. The board has also approved the development this year of a new online funding platform which can be used to host funds from other local and national awarding bodies.

This will go live from 2023-2024 and will help the sector locate funding sources easily as well as utilise the TSIs local knowledge in grant awarding.

For 2024 we will also seek to democratise access to funds by hosting Funder Fairs and publicising local funds as the community benefit funds from infrastructure developers such as wind farms become available in greater amounts.

Volunteering

In December 2022 the TSI hosted a well-attended Volunteer conference chaired by Jenni Minto MSP which identified a number of key areas that third sector organisations would like to see addressed to support volunteering. Our snapshot survey found that post pandemic volunteers were fatigued, and some were put off from volunteering because of the cost-of-living crisis.

As a result, we have researched a Volunteer and Employee Assistance provider to support both volunteer and employee mental health and resilience and will roll out a platform for use by the sector in 2024.

For 2023-24 we will take this further and seek to build upon the strengths identified within our volunteer networks in Argyll and Bute during the pandemic to encourage new volunteers and provide a shared and more sustainable approach to volunteering. This will include a comprehensive push on the existing volunteering platform as well as supporting best practice and learning for volunteer recruitment, training and retention.

Another key development in the year has been the successful transition of the volunteering aspect of the government's Young Person's Guarantee programme into Positive Destinations which is now funded until 2025 through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. For 2022-2023 over 30 people, across a range of age ranges, have been supported by TSI employed mentors to help people progress towards positive destinations in their employment, education and training journeys.

Volunteer of the Year Awards 2023

The 2023 Volunteer of the Year Awards in Brander Lodge, Taynuilt, marked a significant milestone for Argyll and Bute's voluntary sector, attracting over 150 attendees, making it the most successful event to date. Celebrating exceptional volunteers from across the region, the awards highlighted the unwavering dedication and positive community impact of individuals and organisations.



Marie MacDougall

Among the highlights was Marie MacDougall receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award, honouring her 40+ years of volunteering, notably her decade-long dedication to Hope Kitchen in Oban. Marie's daily commitment, from preparing meals to running earring workshops, coupled with her therapeutic dog visits to care homes, has made her a cornerstone of the community.



This year's gathering not only acknowledged the remarkable contributions of volunteers like Marie but also introduced significant initiatives for the coming year, including a comprehensive Employee and Volunteer Assistance Programme and the innovative Small Grants Innovation Fund, aimed at bolstering support and fostering growth within the sector.

The event was held in partnership with Live Argyll and the Health & Social Care Partnership.

A mix of videos and volunteer interviews produced by local Community Interest Company (CIC), AyeGlas, showcased the invaluable contribution volunteering makes to Argyll and Bute. The event was again livestreamed directly to YouTube for those unable to attend.

