

**Social Action  
Inquiry Scotland**

**Policy Review:  
Findings from  
Social Action  
Inquiry Scotland**

**Visit: [socialaction.scot](http://socialaction.scot)**

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# Introduction

## Policy Review: Findings from Social Action Inquiry Scotland

social action?

Financial Resource.

Collective Action.

What helps & hinders  
social action?

IDENTITIES

What helps & hinders  
social action?

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## The Request

Social Action Inquiry Scotland<sup>1</sup> commissioned Unity Consulting Scotland<sup>2</sup> to review the materials published by the Inquiry and to:

- Identify any relevant policy implications related to these four sets of materials
- Identify any leverage points/current opportunities in the policy and political systems
- Develop a draft engagement plan to action these opportunities/leverage points
- Develop a budget and prospective timeline for delivering this engagement plan

## Overview

What is Social Action?

“Social action is people creating positive change in their communities.”<sup>1</sup>

## Who was Involved?

Social Action Inquiry Scotland is an interdependent inquiry into social action in Scotland. The Inquiry partnered with seventeen communities across Scotland who are responding to the needs of their communities through social action. These seventeen communities have shared their stories of what helps and hinders their social action at: [socialaction.scot/stories](https://socialaction.scot/stories).



**“Social Action Inquiry Scotland is made of daughters, sons, mothers, fathers, neighbours, activists, storytellers, people of colour, rural dwellers, urban dwellers, people of faith, queer, neurodivergent, people with disabilities, asylum seekers and refugees, people in recovery. We are some of the people of Scotland.”<sup>1</sup>**

This report will reflect on each of the stories published by the Inquiry and list the issues that those who participated in them believe helps and hinders social action and what actions could deliver positive change for that project. Whilst the actions identified may be specific to each project, they may also be relevant to other stories and social action projects more general.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://socialaction.scot/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://unityconsulting.scot/>

## Who was involved (continued)

It is not possible in this short report to identify all the opportunities to influence decision makers and policy, we will therefore show examples of where some of the opportunities may lie for each of the groups involved.

The engagement strategy that accompanies this report contains a toolkit of options that can be used to advance different projects and causes at different times. Communities supported by the communications and campaigns teams within partner and funding organisations could work alongside a proactive progressive, public affairs company to pick and choose how and when to use different elements of the toolkit to gain maximum advantage, influence and leverage.

## Immediate Opportunities

The Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2024/5 is an obvious opportunity to influence policy and legislation. The Programme identifies four main priorities, which chime with many of the themes running through the community stories that are part of Social Action Inquiry Scotland and provide campaigning opportunities for each of the storytellers.

Eradicating child poverty

Growing our economy

Tackling the climate emergency

Improving public services

The Programme will see fourteen bills introduced during the 2024/25 parliamentary year:

- Adults with Incapacity
- Budget (No. 4)
- Building Safety Levy
- Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets)
- Community Wealth Building
- Criminal Justice Modernisation and Abusive Domestic Behaviour Reviews
- Crofting
- Leases (Automatic continuation etc)
- Heat in Buildings
- Misogyny
- Natural Environment
- Post-School Education Reform
- Prisoners
- UEFA EURO 2028

## Immediate Opportunities (continued)

Some of these bills will provide obvious opportunities for influencing, leverage and lobbying, however many more opportunities lie outside the government's programme.

**The UK Government has set itself 5 missions. These are:**

- Make Britain a clean energy superpower
- Secure the highest sustained growth in the G7
- Build an NHS fit for the future
- Breakdown barriers to opportunity at every stage
- Make Britain's streets safe<sup>3</sup>

The UK government's legislative programme contains 40 bills and is "based upon the principles of security, fairness and opportunity for all."<sup>4</sup>

The following is a selection of some of the bills that communities, partners and funders may wish to target as part of the influencing strategy. A number of government bills are unlikely to affect Scotland as the provisions they deal with are devolved to the Scottish Parliament. However, the passing of them may provide new revenue for Scotland via Barnett consequential. Also, if they are deemed as being positive and beneficial to communities, partners and funders they can be used as leverage.

- Crime and Policing Bill
- Finance Bill
- Renters Rights Bill (likely to only affect England but its provisions could be used to lobby in Scotland)
- Employment Rights Bill
- Better Buses Bill (likely to only affect England but its provisions could be used to lobby in Scotland)
- Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill
- Mental Health Bill (likely to only affect England but its provisions could be used to lobby in Scotland)
- Children's Wellbeing Bill ((likely to only affect England but its provisions could be used to lobby in Scotland)
- Draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill
- Draft Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill

Potential opportunities for influencing will be identified in this report and the accompanying engagement plan.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://tunbridgewells.laboursites.org/national-labour-2/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-kings-speech-2024>

# The Stories

A major element of the Social Action Inquiry's learning came via the sharing of stories from communities. The following gives a brief summary of each story then lists what storytellers believe helps and hinders social action relating to each project. Where appropriate we have grouped them together under broad headings.

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# Black and Minority Ethnic Stories

These six stories relate to social action in Scotland's Black and minority ethnic communities. Whilst each project is different there are several common themes, whilst other issues are project specific.

## Amen Sam Roma (We are Roma): This is Our Home

Romano Lav's Community Catalysts programme is designed to shift power to Roma youth as they learn about their rights and how to stand up for them and for their communities. The project is based in Govanhill, Glasgow.

### What Helps?

- Community support and solidarity
- Educational engagement from schools and individual teachers
- Hunger to learn
- Influential peers growing and leading
- Support from other groups/agencies such as Living Rent, Poverty Alliance etc.
- Role models
- Peer support
- Opportunities in formal and community education

### What Hinders?

- Ignorance of the Roma community
- History of discrimination
- Prejudice and racism
- Bullying and harassment
- Being seen to be different
- Poor health
- Poor educational outcomes
- Sexist/patriarchal/roles and attitudes within the Roma community
- Early marriage and young motherhood
- Time pressures and traditional role of women
- Poor housing opportunities/living conditions
- Lack of understanding of individual rights
- Institutional prejudice NHS, Schools, DWP etc.



Despite all of the challenges,  
our people are strong.



## Maternal Care Inequality in Scotland: Black Women's Voices for Social Action

Maternal Care Inequality in Scotland: Black Women's Voices for Social Action is a story about two Glasgow-based Black women's lived experiences of maternal health care within the NHS. It reflects the troubling reality of why people of colour are four times more likely to die in childbirth than their white counterparts in the UK.

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*Why do black women have to be -  
in excruciating pain and screaming,  
dismissed, ignored, and felt like a  
nuisance?*

*I put my foot down... I yelled!  
I stated that I am not leaving this time!*

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## Heritage for Prosperity: An African Perspective of Starting 'a fresh' in Scotland

Based in Glasgow, Afreshe is a Scottish Charity that promotes heritage to nurture the esteem of African children, young people and adults through active participation in their local communities.

Heritage connects us all and helps us to engage candidly with each other. Afreshe promotes heritage to unlock the active contribution of people of African ethnicity to Scotland's prosperity. Projects and activities are themed around embracing, reconnecting and sharing heritage.

### What Helps?

- Committed and talented trustees and leadership who drive projects forward
- Corporate support
- Emergency funding
- Shifting some in-person activities to online
- Professional input
- Engagement with young people
- Relevant projects e.g. supporting good mental health
- Performing and sharing joy, raising awareness of African cultures to new audiences

### What Hinders?

- Lack of funding hinders project development and stops the organisation from attracting professional help and inspiring role models
- Lack of experience in preparing funding applications
- A lack of feedback from funding sources
- Racial discrimination
- The disproportionate reluctance from men (compared with women) to engage with Afreshe's work.
- Unconscious bias - Project partners failing to understand Afreshe's work and taking over projects without realising
- Having no full-time staff

## Hum Ek Hai (We are One)

Hum Ek Hai (We are One) examined individual personal experiences of social action within diverse minority ethnic communities in Scotland. The main focus of this has been to discover what helps and hinders social action within diverse cultures, faiths, and backgrounds.

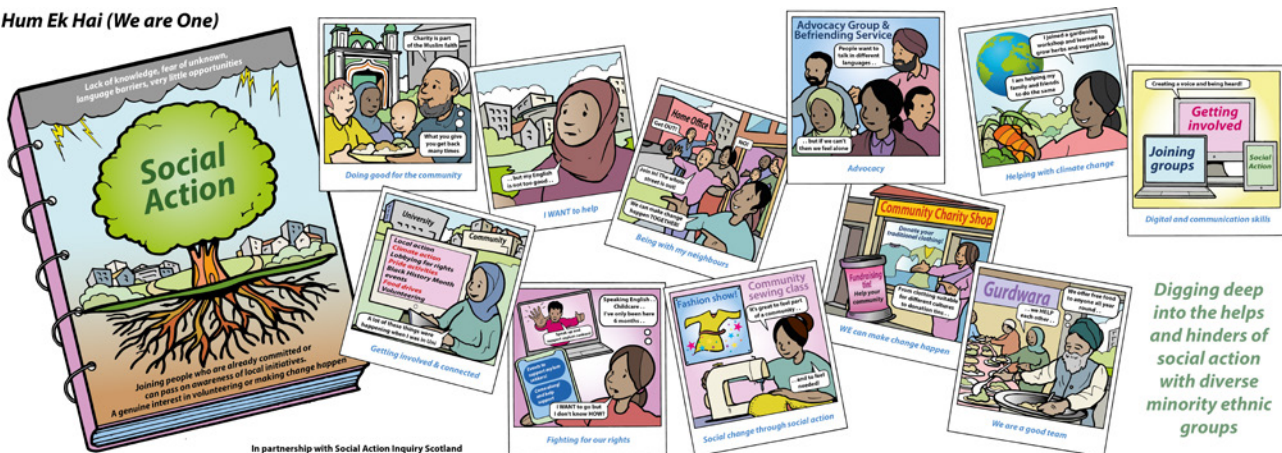
### What Helps?

- Joining people who are already committed or can pass on awareness of local initiatives
- A genuine interest in volunteering or making change happen
- Seeing people doing good in the community
- Getting involved and connected
- Being with and supported by neighbours
- Seeing social change through social action
- Advocacy
- Successes
- Teamwork
- Good communications and getting your voice heard

### What Hinders?

- Lack of knowledge
- Fear of unknown
- Language barriers
- Very little opportunities
- Lack of childcare
- Not knowing about your rights

### Hum Ek Hai (We are One)



## It's Like Looking Up to a Mountain

This story tells how a community reacted after a child was racially attacked within a school setting. Responding to this incident the parent's and community experienced the shortcomings of institutional systems in place. They responded by creating People Of Colour in Education Scotland (POCE). It is led by Priscilla Mandona. Priscilla's mission is to help empower young people of colour in Scottish Education and enable them to reach their full potential.

### What Helps?

- Diversity focused Education and Training in schools for pupils and teachers
- Understanding and appreciation of the immigrant story
- Shining a light on racism
- Collective strength
- Safe spaces for young people of colour
- Empowering young people
- Listening
- Changing attitudes

### What Hinders?

- Racism
- Lack of education and ignorance
- Lack of opportunities
- The invisible burden of racism
- Exhaustion and the toll of fighting back
- Invisible, structural, opposition
- Silence and not listening



## Three Stories from the Waiting Room

Three Stories from the Waiting Room is a series of short stories based on interviews with members of a Glasgow-based community group that supports refugees and asylum seekers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The aim of these narratives was to build a visible archive of what the DRC community experienced during the Coronavirus lockdowns.

### What Helps?

- Community support
- Leadership
- Resilience and Strength
- Love and hopefulness
- Desire to help others

### What Hinders?

- Language Barriers
- Accessing basic needs (like food) and services
- Fear
- Feelings of vulnerability
- Dealing with grief
- Discrimination
- Transport costs
- Stress of navigating the system
- Length of time waiting on an asylum application
- Mental health problems

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When Lydia asked him, “How long did it take you to get your papers?”

He texted back, “I’m still waiting. Hopefully soon.”

Simon had been waiting for sixteen years.

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## Policy arena

The Scottish Government projects an image of Scotland as a country playing its part in the international community by welcoming refugees, asylum seekers and new Scots and a country committed to human rights. Outside of immediate legislative considerations there are many opportunities to influence policy across a range of areas such as third sector support/ funding, housing, health and social care, education, equalities, human rights, culture and heritage etc.

One example is which sets out the actions that the Scottish Government, COSLA and Scottish Refugee Council will take forward with partners during the period 2024 to 2026 to support the integration of refugees, people seeking asylum and other forced migrants within Scotland's communities.

### **There are six outcomes to the Strategy:**

1. New Scots live in safe, welcoming, inclusive communities, where everyone's dignity is respected, and everyone is able to build diverse relationships and healthy intercultural bonds.
2. New Scots are able to access well-coordinated services, which recognise and meet their rights and needs.
3. New Scots understand their rights, responsibilities and entitlements in Scotland and are able to exercise these to pursue full and independent lives. New Scots can pursue their ambitions through education, employment, culture and leisure activities in diverse communities.
4. Communities in Scotland understand integration interculturally and respect the diversity and strengths that New Scots bring.
5. Policy, strategic planning, and legislation, that have an impact on New Scots, are shaped through their participation and informed by their rights, needs and aspirations.
6. The principles of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy guide all future responses to crises that bring forced migrants to Scotland and seek to ensure all such migrants will be treated equitably.<sup>5</sup>

Given the broad range of policy areas covered by the strategy it provides multiple opportunities to lobby the government, local government and the third sector and hold them to account for the delivery of the plan.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/new-scots-refugee-integration-strategy-delivery-plan-2024-2026/>

## Opportunities

There will be opportunities in the Scottish Government's The Programme for Government for example, the Misogyny Bill, Community Wealth Building Bill, Criminal Justice Modernisation and Abusive Domestic Behaviour Reviews Bil.

The budget process provides organisations and other third sector and community partners the opportunity to press for system change, increased resources and new ways of allocating them.

Those involved in the stories can take advantage of the parliamentary, local government and health and social care systems of governance to highlight the impact of prejudice and discrimination, health inequalities, poverty, poor housing, human rights concerns, education and social and cultural issues but also showcase the positive aspects of different cultures, successful community projects, positive social action, inspiring role models and the benefits of advocacy.

They can also take opportunities that arise in local communities and seek to influence third sector and local and national government policy initiatives and funding rounds. There will be many opportunities that arise throughout the year. For example, issues around breaking down language barriers could be addressed in partnership with local colleges. Understanding rights and providing advocacy could be discussed in partnership with councils, the Citizens Advice Bureau and advice services, and promoting and showcasing successes, teamwork and the benefits of volunteering could be done through partnership working with local and national agencies.

The UK Government's Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill will affect the whole of the UK and provide opportunities for organisations working with migrants and asylum seekers to seek to influence legislation. Whilst the other bills appear to focus on England and Wales, communities, partners and funders should be vigilant in case any of them have UK wide effect. This could be the case for some of the criminal justice bills.

These stories align to the Scottish Government's policy of eradicating child poverty and the UK Government's missions to **Breakdown barriers to opportunity at every stage** and **Build an NHS fit for the future.**

The engagement plan will identify engagement opportunities.

# Trade Unions

## There's Power in a Union

Trade unions are collective organisations that help organise working people both in the workplace & communities. They help negotiate with employers, represent members at grievance and disciplinary hearings, provide legal and financial advice, educational opportunities and benefits to members and they campaign for social, economic and environmental justice.

### What Helps?

- Unity of purpose
- Doers - people who get on with it
- Employers who recognise unions
- Direct action
- The skilled application of technology
- Good communications
- Solidarity
- Working with the community
- Team work
- Good role models
- Shared and celebrated victories
- Good relationships with employers
- Taking opportunities
- Inspirational leadership
- Education and learning

### What Hinders?

- Fear
- Hostile employers
- Apathy
- Lack of confidence amongst members
- Negative public perception
- Division
- Job insecurity/transient workers
- Poverty and low pay
- The law
- Bureaucracy
- Union rivalry/internal culture





## Policy arena

Legislative competence over trade union and employment law is, in the main, held by the UK Government. However, as an employer the Scottish Government and local government both have responsibilities in relation to the way which the law is implemented.

The Scottish Government's Fair Work agenda is the overarching policy framework relating to trade unions in Scotland. The Fair Work Convention brings together the government, the business community, third sector and trade unions to discuss and report on different sectors of the economy and the impact on workers. The Convention's vision is "that, by 2025, people in Scotland will have a world-leading working life where fair work drives success, wellbeing and prosperity for individuals, businesses, organisations and society."<sup>6</sup>

The Scottish Trade Union congress also meets twice a year with the First Minister to discuss areas of concern/interest.

The UK Government has appointed a Secretary of State for Business and Trade who meets regularly with trade union representatives to discuss areas of concern and policy issues. Government Ministers are also expected to meet the TUC and individual trade union leaders regularly and to speak at union conferences and events.

## Opportunities

These established forums provide an opportunity for trade unions to influence the Scottish and UK government's agenda.

The newly elected UK Government's Employment Rights Bill provides a major opportunity for trade unions to influence legislation. Many aspects of it will have come from the trade union movement's campaigning work. Whilst this is being hailed as a "potential game changer"<sup>7</sup> by the TUC, trade unions will need to ensure that the bill is not watered down and weakened during its parliamentary passage. This will require extensive engagement, lobbying and organised campaigning.

These projects and stories align with the Scottish Government's policy of Improving public services and the UK Government's missions to Breakdown barriers to opportunity at every stage and Secure the highest sustained growth in the G7.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.fairworkconvention.scot/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/employment-rights-bill-potential-gamechanger>

# Housing

## And Numbers We Will Bring

This story follows Living Rent, a growing group of tenants and community organisers in Scotland determined to end the misery and isolation caused by profiteering landlords, and a housing system that treats people's homes as an investment. Their idea is simple: to build a union of tenants that brings people across Scotland together to fight for tenants' rights, repairs, affordable rents and social housing through grassroots community power.

### What Helps?

- Camaraderie, solidarity and peer support
- Celebrating Victories
- Building from Local to National
- Living Rent's strength comes from its local branches
- People centred/local approach

### What hinders?

- Poverty and poor living conditions
- The pace of change
- The pursuit of profit
- Financial power of developers
- Technocratic onslaught



## Policy arena

The privatisation of council housing through the Right to Buy, the growth of the private sector, landlord profiteering, rising private rents and cuts to housing grants to councils and housing associations and proliferation of short-term holiday lets has left Scotland in the midst of a housing crisis. There are not enough homes for Scotland's population with the situation in some rural areas particularly acute.

In 2023/24 there were 40,685 homeless applications made to local authorities. Of these, 33,619 households were assessed as being homeless or threatened with homelessness. The number of households that became homeless rose by 4% compared to the year before.<sup>8</sup> This shows no sign of being arrested, therefore the debate is only likely to intensify in the run up to the 2026 Scottish election.

The UK government has announced new house building targets and announced it will take steps to free up the planning process to allow more homes to be built.

## Opportunities

Housing will be a key issue in the run up to the Scottish Parliament elections. Living Rent's focus could be on influencing the political parties to include their priorities in the manifestos of each political party standing in the 2026 election.

Their policy aims could include their New Deal for Private Tenants, New Deal for Social and Public Tenants, rent controls and the building of more council and social housing. Manifestos are written well in advance of elections so they could/should undertake this activity at the earliest opportunity.

They can use the UK and Scottish Parliaments and local authorities budget processes to campaign for increases in the housing budget, rent controls and increased house building. They could also take any positive elements of the UK government's Renters Rights Bill and Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill and build a campaign for their introduction in Scotland.

Living Rent successfully uses local cases such as evictions, poor housing maintenance etc to highlight campaigning issues, these could be highlighted through the media and on social media at every opportunity.

These projects stories align to the Scottish Government's policy of Eradicating child poverty and Improving public services and the UK Government's missions to **Breakdown barriers to opportunity at every stage** and **Secure the highest sustained growth in the G7.**

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<sup>8</sup> Shelter Scotland, Housing Policy, Homelessness Statistics in Scotland.

# Justice

## Aiding and Abetting Social Action in Scotland: 4 Stories from the Heart

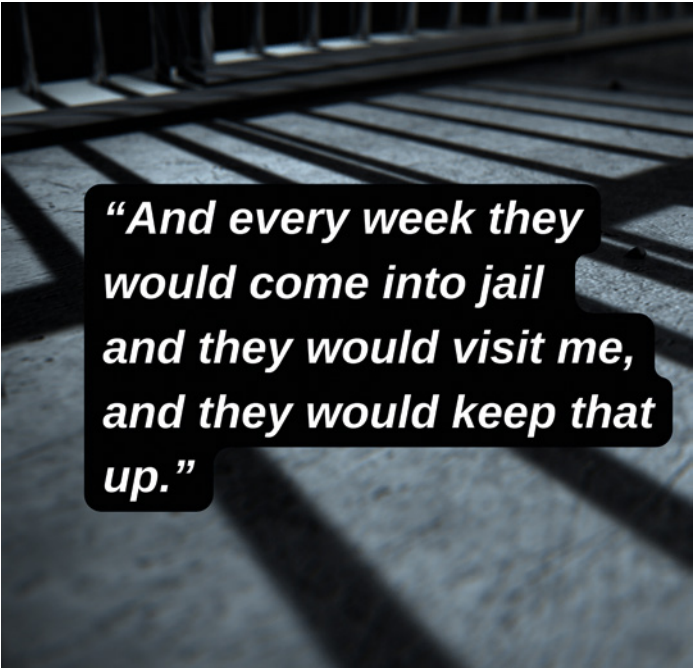
Aid and Abet is a peer led organisation offering a support service to people on their release from prison. Aid and Abet's focus is aiding recovery and abetting people from going back to prison. Mentors have lived experience of the criminal justice system and understand the barriers faced in prison and when integrating back into the community. They assist people leaving prison to engage with housing, financial, health and addiction support services.

### What Helps?

- Early intervention and prevention of barriers being erected
- Peer support/personnel connection
- Help from those who have been there
- Healthcare, accommodation, food and water
- Reduced stress
- Building trust and showing love through actions
- Resilience, self-awareness and compassion
- Building relationships
- Actions to break the cycle of reoffending
- Support with housing, health, employment, DWP etc.
- Help to reintegrate into the community
- Building self-worth/self esteem
- Volunteering opportunities
- Acceptance

### What Hinders?

- Childhood trauma, abuse, poverty, crime, addiction, family breakdown
- Biological, social and psychological barriers
- Lack of support - housing, health, employment, socialisation during transition from prison to community
- Financial barriers
- Rules and bureaucracy that creates barriers
- Stigma/reputation/history/prejudice
- Revolving door of offending
- Broken relationships
- Being labelled and judged



***“And every week they would come into jail and they would visit me, and they would keep that up.”***



## Let the People Sing

Let the People Sing (LtPS) is a not-for-profit community-based organisation which is dedicated to improving the lives of those who have become problematic substance users, their families and friends. The sole mission of LtPS is to mobilise resources within and outside of the recovery community to increase the availability and quality of long-term recovery from alcohol and other drug addiction.

### What Helps?

- Communities leading - doing it ourselves
- Inspiring people
- Mutual help
- Collective advocacy
- Peer support
- Working with likeminded people
- Good friend offering good support
- Ability to give time back to the community
- Grassroots action
- Confidence building
- Good role models
- Channelling creativity, talents and skills
- Everyone playing a part
- Empathy, understanding, feeling safe

### What Hinders?

- Lack of services
- Budget cuts
- Self-doubt
- Fear of change
- Trauma/adverse experiences
- Reputation/stigma/ people's feeling towards individuals involved
- Institutional prejudice
- Bureaucracy creating barriers
- Loss of key personnel
- Working with people with a traumatic past is not easy

## Policy arena

Drug deaths in Scotland are at record levels, more than twice as high as England and the worst in Europe. There was a 9.6% increase in recorded deaths between 2022/23. Year on year increases in deaths have forced the issue up the political agenda. In 2021 following mounting political pressure the Scottish Government declared a public health emergency and established a National Mission Drugs Mission on Drugs Deaths<sup>9</sup> to reduce drug deaths and improve the lives of those impacted by drugs. Central to this is a public health approach to the crisis.

The Scottish Drug Deaths Task Force was established in July 2019. It was tasked with examining the key drivers of drug deaths and exploring ways to help to save lives and reduce harm. Following the launch of the National Mission in 2021, the Task Force's role changed from commissioning projects and tests of change to providing evidence-based advice and recommendations to the Government.

The situation with alcohol deaths is tragically similar with the number of people in Scotland whose death was caused by alcohol at its highest in 15 years. Scotland has the highest death rate from alcohol in the UK.

The latest figures from National Records of Scotland, (NRS) show 1,277 people died from conditions caused by alcohol in 2023. Alison Douglas of Alcohol focus said:

“Despite the Scottish Government’s acknowledgement that this is a public health emergency, we are still not seeing an adequate emergency response. Alcohol deaths continue to rise, yet people accessing alcohol treatment in Scotland have declined by 40 per cent over the last 10 years. This has to change.”<sup>10</sup>

The publication of the annual drugs and alcohol death statistics provokes a flurry of media and political interest and there is likely to be a heightened political focus on alcohol and drugs in the run up to the 2026 Scottish election. This provides a major opportunity for organisations like Let the People Sing to influence the debate over how to best address these crises.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/update-drugs-policy/>

<sup>10</sup> Holyrood article: Scotland continues to have the highest rate of alcohol deaths in the UK. April 2024.

## Opportunities

A concerted year-round lobbying effort is required to show that there is an alternative to what has gone before and that system change is required. The time is now to showcase successes and challenge the established way of doing things and lobby for a different way to use scarce resources.

Engagement opportunities lie with the Scottish Government, local government, NHS, Health and Social care partnerships, Scottish Prison Service, Police Scotland, political parties and third sector partners and potentially with elements of the UK government's Criminal Justice Bills.

Scotland's prison system is also very firmly in the spotlight. The prison population is at record levels, the estate is in need of major investment and cells are overcrowded. Such is the concern at the situation that an emergency release scheme saw around 500 non-violent prisoners released early over the summer to free up space. However, the most recent figures show that despite this scheme the prison population has increased instead of decreased and the pressures remain intense.

Allied to this are high levels of reoffending, record alcohol deaths and Scotland's reputation as the drugs death capital of Europe.

These factors provide opportunities to influence on the Scottish Government, its agencies, local government and the UK Government to look at new ways of addressing offending, preventing reoffending and the social, economic and practical issues that contribute to it. Aid and Abet are well placed to make the case for a change of approach and showcase the organisation's success.

There will also be many opportunities throughout the year where Aid and Abet and Let the People Sing should be seeking to influence decision makers. The people involved in these projects are the real experts in the areas they work in, and their experience and knowledge could be very influential if appropriately targeted. The engagement plan will identify the ways in which this can be done.

These projects and stories align to the Scottish Government's policy of **Eradicating child poverty** and Improving public services and the UK Government's missions to **Breakdown barriers to opportunity at every stage** and **Make Britain's streets safe**.

# Participation

## Consider with Care

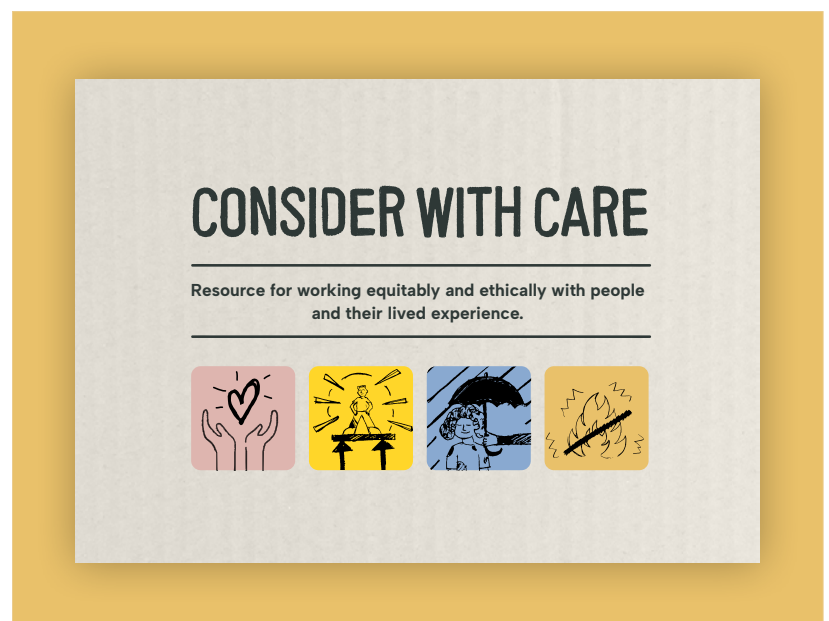
Consider with Care is a digital resource created for organisations who work with people with lived experience to inform their policies, services and campaigning materials. The resource aims to guide organisations towards using more equitable and ethical methods of participation.

### What Helps?

- Sharing power
- Building confidence skills and experience
- Opportunities to shape and deliver work
- Contributors recognized through pay or development opportunities
- Participatory processes
- Opportunities to go beyond lived experience
- A clear shared purpose
- Mutually beneficial events
- A duty of care
- A sensitive language
- Trauma informed practice
- Follow up support
- Boundaries to discussions to avoid further trauma
- Development opportunities
- A check in list

### What Hinders?

- Power and balance between the organisation and individual
- Not allowing the person to have a say in how lived experience is used
- Ignoring our persons personal or professional experience
- Trying to change a person's experience to suit the organisations narrative
- Preconceived ideas
- Exploiting a person's experience
- Burnout
- Feeling undervalued
- Being commodified
- Feeling pleased
- Having little or no support





## Inspiring Young Voices – Inspire Highland

Inspiring Young Voices (IYVs) is a Highland charity enabling children and young people with additional support needs/disabilities or who have experienced trauma to take control of their lives by promoting their voices, rights, participation and empowering them to have a greater say in decisions that affect their lives.

The stories have been produced by the young people from IYV's Inspire Highland project, a group of young people with diverse experiences and disabilities who come together to speak out, raise awareness and campaign for change.

### What Helps?

- Collective strength and action
- Children's rights
- Empowerment
- Safe spaces
- Building support and trust
- Young people led
- Kindness, humour and laughter
- New voices
- Role models
- Pride in self
- Understanding
- Campaigning

### What Hinders?

- Public attitudes
- Systemic pushback
- Limited resources
- Lack of opportunities
- Public transport links
- Inaccessible transport
- Inaccessible public buildings
- Stigma
- Same 'old' voices
- Young people should be central to policy that affects them. They must be consulted with, listened to and included.



## Policy arena

Over recent decades there has been a growing emphasis on the importance of hearing the voice of those with lived experience in the development of policy. This is generally viewed as a good thing by those participating in the stories as they want to influence how services are designed and delivered and not have things imposed upon them. Those involved in policy development talk of the 'co-production' of policy and services but the stories show that many issues remain.

We often see policy documents, research, workshops, seminars etc. providing opportunities for people to tell their story as a case study to emphasise the need for change or as evidence of how something is working well. In areas such as health, criminal justice and social care participants can be put on a very public platform to recall traumatic times or events from their past. Whilst this can be valuable in gaining a practical understanding of the overall points being made it can, if not handled appropriately result in further trauma, stigma, burnout and feelings of exploitation.

People with lived experience want to have a say in the development of services and about the issues that impact on their lives but they want to be able to do this in a safe, accessible way where they are respected.

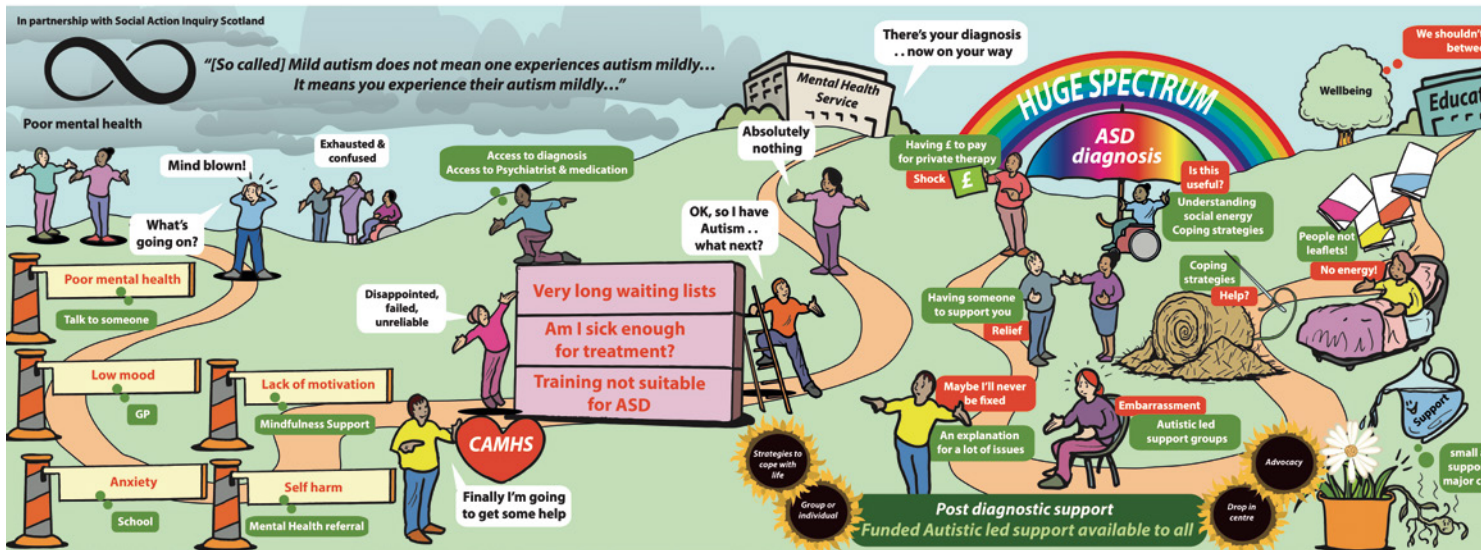
## Opportunities

Across the health and social care system health boards, health and social care partnerships, third sector partners, advocacy and pressure groups could be targeted to make the case for the resources and actions needed to change attitudes and support systems. There are ongoing opportunities within the Scottish Parliament for the voice of those with lived experience to be heard for example, at committee evidence sessions, events and receptions.

All the groups who told their story will have numerous opportunities to influence decision makers, these need to be led and developed in close consultation with the organisations.

For those who told their stories there are opportunities to work with a wide range of agencies to ensure that events, services, consultations, transport, education, health, social care, culture and leisure facilities are accessible to all, and everyone's needs are taken into consideration, and to promote and embed good practice.

These projects and stories align to the Scottish Government's policy of **Eradicating child poverty** and Improving public services and the UK Government's missions to **Breakdown barriers to opportunity at every stage** and Build an NHS fit for the future.



# Health and social care

## Conversations with the Autistic Community

Conversations with the Autistic Community was created as a visual way to display the important parts of conversations with members of the autistic community. These conversations mainly surrounded what they saw as the barriers to navigating through parts of their lives and what they thought helped them cope.

This story broke down the helps and hinders into 4 phases:

### Pre-diagnosis

#### What Helps?

- Talking to someone you trust
- Going to the GP
- Referral for diagnosis
- Referral to mental health team
- Distractions using music or mindfulness apps

#### What Hinders?

- Poor Mental Health
- Low Mood
- Anxiety
- Self-harm
- Lack of motivation

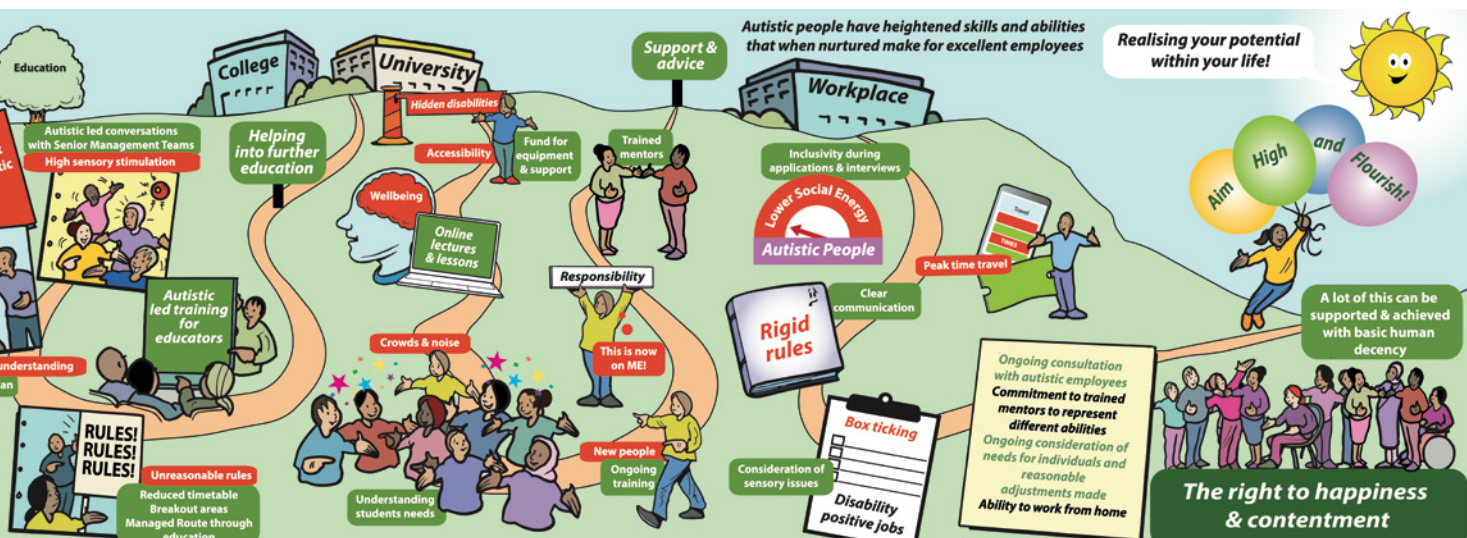
### Post Diagnosis

#### What Helps?

- Therapist specialising in Autism
- Understanding common issues
- Support from family/friends
- Coping strategies
- Find support groups online
- Autistic-led post diagnostic support groups

#### What Hinders?

- Shock
- Relief
- Embarrassment
- Huge spectrum leads to lack of clarity
- Uncertainty about future
- Finding help



## Education

### What Helps?

- Clear conversations with senior management teams
- Safety plan
- Reduced timetable
- Discreet breakout areas
- Managed route through education
- Commitment to ongoing training for professionals

### What Hinders?

- High sensory stimulation
- Lack of understanding of autistic needs by professionals
- Unreasonable and rigid rules
- Lack of consideration of needs for hidden disabilities
- Mentor student support

## Workplace

### What Helps?

- Inclusivity during application. process and interview stages
- Clear communication
- Working from home
- Consideration of sensory issues.
- Trained mentors to consult with people with disabilities.
- Ongoing consideration of needs

### What Hinders?

- Busy or noisy workplaces.
- Autistic people can have lower social energy.
- Rigid and unnecessary rules.
- Travel to work during peak times

## Unmasked

Unmasked is a story is based on the following understanding of disability - we understand disability to be: those who are medically disabled, chronically ill and the social model of disability, which includes medically healthy people who are disabled by societal barriers. Some disabled people engage in actions or coping strategies that hide their emotions, thoughts, physical pain, discomfort or other genuine challenges related to their disability. These techniques of suppressing your natural way of being is referred to as masking.

### What Helps?

- Safe spaces for people affected
- Reasonable adjustments to workplace/ environment
- Challenge Cultural Stereotypes about neurodivergence
- Cultural shift via education re harms of masking
- Normalise neurodivergence
- Increase the knowledge of neurodivergence
- Quality diversity training across all ]sectors/workplaces
- Working from home should be an option where possible

### What Hinders?

- Underlying and persistent fears of inadequacy
- Cultural and social attitudes - often trivialised
- Stigma
- Lack of education
- Invisible struggle



## It Takes a Village to Raise a Child

Families First is a grassroots organisation based in St Andrews that provides psychosocial support to children, young people, and families. They are reliant on a community of like-minded volunteers who are crucial to its service in order to provide one-to-one befriending services, youth groups, and parental/carer support. These services help to enable children and young people to overcome challenges in their lives.

### What Helps?

- Volunteering
- Community & Mutual Support
- Community Co-operation
- Consistency of Support
- Supportive space for young people
- A purpose built facility
- More staff

### What Hinders?

- Inconsistent and restrictive funding
- Inefficient use of time from making funding applications
- Limited space
- Over-reliance on student volunteers
- Insufficient numbers of 'community' volunteers needed



## Policy arena

These projects offer an insight into the multiple barriers faced by people who require support to manage a neurodivergent, physical, emotional or mental health need at different times in their lives and how these can be overcome to allow them to participate fully in society. Public policy in Scotland speaks about 'co-production', 'person centred care' and support to live independently in the community. However, budget restraint, cuts to services, NHS waiting lists and the social care crisis has increased pressure on a financially constrained voluntary sector to provide services.

NHS waiting lists see young people often waiting years for professional input for example, an autism diagnosis, psychological support and mental health services. This is putting enormous strain on individuals and families and statutory and non-statutory service providers.

## Opportunities

The National Care Service Bill could have been an opportunity to address some of these issues, but the future of the Bill is uncertain as many organisations who were consulted on it have withdrawn their support. There are however other avenues for communities, partners and funders to focus on including the Scottish Government's Adults with Incapacity and Post 16 Education Reform Bills and the UK government's Mental Health and Children's Wellbeing Bills.

The vast array of committees and sub-committees of local authorities, health and social care partnerships and NHS boards are the key decision-making bodies that could be targeted to try to influence policy, embed good practice, challenge attitudes and develop support systems. They are also important forums for holding service providers to account. On some of these patients and voluntary sector organisations have a reserved place, this is another opportunity to exert influence.

Engagement with education providers, employers and the voluntary sector could also help to begin removing barriers to learning, jobs and opportunities.

These projects and stories align to the Scottish Government's policy of **Eradicating child poverty** and **Improving public services** and the UK Government's missions to **Breakdown barriers to opportunity at every stage** and Build an NHS fit for the future.

# Third Sector

## The Third Sector Grind

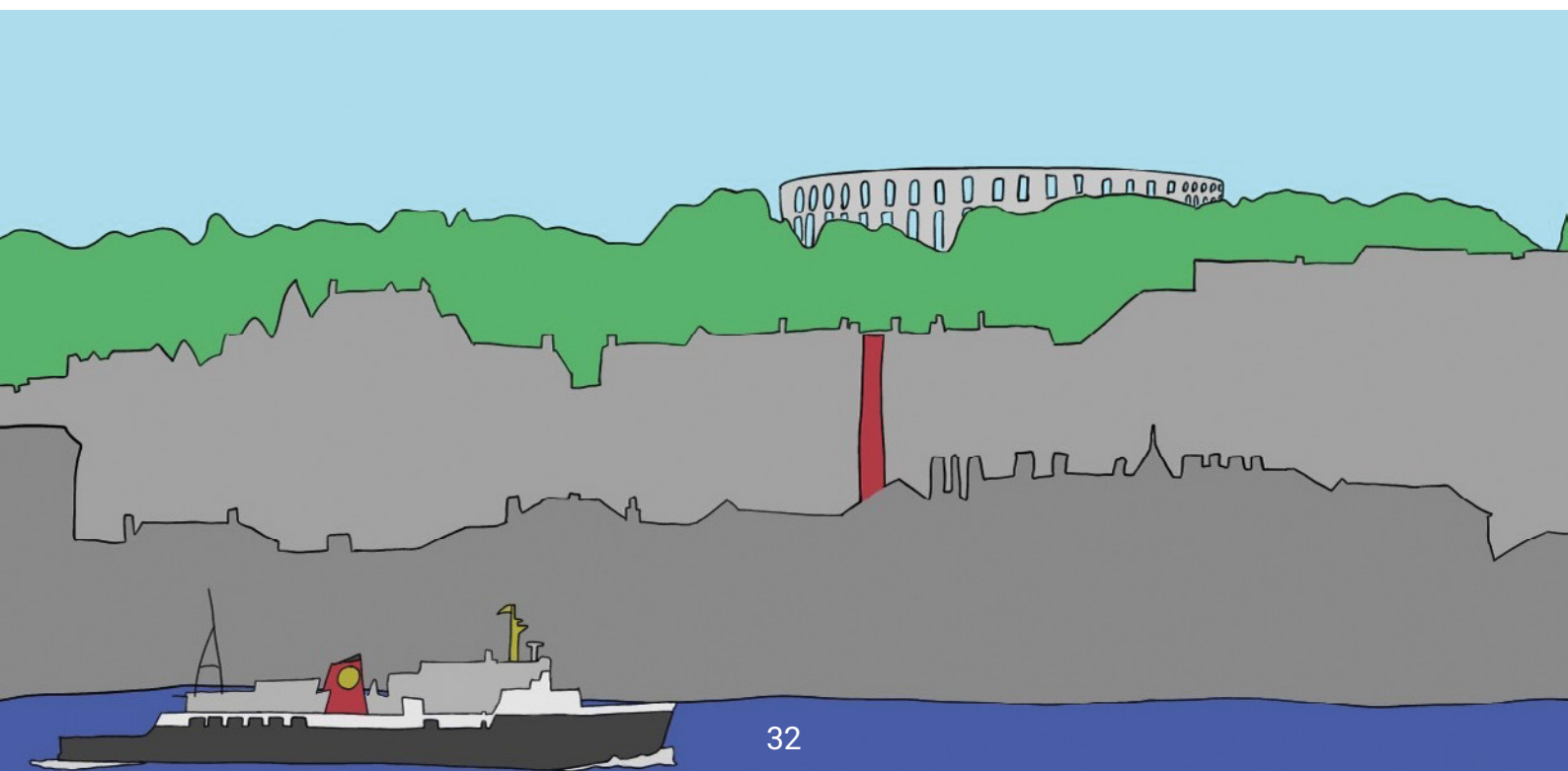
Due to various factors out with their control, many third sector organisations feel stretched and under pressure to hit targets and deliver objectives. As a result, practitioners often don't take the time to focus on their own mental health and wellbeing which can eventually lead to burnout. The Third Sector Grind tells the story of six practitioners working as part of Oban-based community-led organisations and the trials, tribulations and little bits of magic that they have experienced during their careers.

### What Helps?

- Funding certainty
- Shared values and goals
- Shared drive towards making a positive impact
- Support for the community by the community
- Passion and Drive

### What Hinders?

- Limited funding
- Short funding cycles
- Wasted time spent on funding applications
- Funding Uncertainty
- Inconsistent staffing
- Job Insecurity
- Duplicated services
- Volunteers and practitioners burnout





## Policy implications

The role of workers in the third sector is regularly overlooked. They are often the lynchpin of projects and central to their success. These staff are often on temporary or fixed term contracts determined by the length of project funding. They have little job security. This means many are constantly on the lookout for another job. This situation is exacerbated by the restricted nature of many funding streams, which is determined by strict criteria that means money can only be spent on specific things which are the priority of the funding organisation, not the project being funded. This can have a destabilising effect on projects with project workers spending inordinate amounts of time completing often long and complex funding applications which in the end may prove unsuccessful as the competition for scarce resources is fierce. Where organisations and projects are funded from different sources the funding period may be different making budgeting and staffing consistency problematic. These issues can 'suck the life' out of projects leaving staff and volunteers demoralised and those who use services with a sense of disappointment and uncertainty.

## Opportunities

These issues are not new to the third sector. SCVO members across the country will have experienced them as will almost all organisations funded by grant awards. There are therefore opportunities to bring groups together to lobby politicians and the grant funders with a call for system change to:

- End short termism
- End the need for endless rounds of funding applications
- Cut bureaucracy and duplication
- Increase job security

SCVO's work on "Fair Funding and Procurement" provides an opportunity to build momentum.

Whilst much of the engagement plan is applicable to the third sector, it may need to be tailored slightly to be more sector specific. For example, to target third sector decision making bodies or influential individuals within it.

This story aligns to the Scottish Government's policy of **Eradicating child poverty** and **UK Government's missions to Breakdown barriers to opportunity at every stage.**



# Environment

## Dundee Community Grower's Network

Dundee Community Grower's Network is a volunteer-based organisation that brings together people from community gardens across the city to connect and get involved with food growing.

### What Helps?

- Common aims
- Enthusiasm
- Companionship
- Seeing the results of your efforts
- Having a nice space
- Support from the network
- Celebrating success
- Shared leadership
- Cooperation between groups
- Inspiring each other
- Practical support
- Having no constitution builds trust
- Less bureaucracy
- An informal structure
- Sharing equipment skills training and knowledge
- Being open about failure and learning from it
- Solidarity
- Creating joy and respect for all involved
- Good communications using technology

### What Hinders?

- A lack of staff to support volunteers
- Too much bureaucracy in funding processes
- Job in security for support staff
- Funders unwilling to provide ongoing cash to successful projects
- Lack of awareness in the community
- Going from funding crisis to funding crisis
- Need to get better at communicating about the project

## Policy implications

Within the Programme for Government the community wealth building bill, climate change bill and budget bill are the most obvious opportunities for influencing. In recent years there has been a growing call to expand community growing projects and the provision of allotments. This in conjunction with the growth in food banks, Scotland's poor diet and the obesity crisis make this an opportune time to seek to influence government policy on the expansion of growing projects.

The Community Empowerment act provides for the asset transfer of land from public bodies to the community where communities feel they can make better use of an asset. This is an example of where community growing projects could use existing legislation to their advantage. The budget bill can be a focus of attention to secure commitments to increase funding for these types of projects.

Projects like this also fit well with mental and physical health policies, older people's strategy, youth work, volunteering and rehabilitation work. Engagement can be undertaken with the Scottish Government, local government and public bodies and private sector organisations with land holdings.

## Opportunities

Tackling the climate emergency is one of the Scottish Government's key priorities and will also be high up the agenda of the UK government. Across the economy and the public sector demands are being placed on companies and agencies to act to address the crisis. Alongside this there is rising food insecurity which is affecting more of our citizens. Local and global solutions are being sought to address these issues.

Projects like the Dundee Growers Network is an example of how these issues are being addressed at a community level. There is an opportunity to showcase the project to influential decision makers at a local and national level in the statutory and voluntary sectors.

This story aligns to the Scottish Government's policy of **Tackling the climate emergency** **Eradicating child poverty** and **UK Government's missions to Breakdown barriers to opportunity at every stage.**

# Emerging Themes and Calls for Action

Social Action Inquiry Scotland's work saw the following four main themes emerge. For each theme the Inquiry identified several calls for action.

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<sup>11</sup> Helping Change Happen Guidebook, Social Action Inquiry Scotland.

## 1. Time to Reflect

Ending the loop of being reactive and repeating past mistakes. It's time to start reflecting more.

We acknowledge it takes time to reflect. Embedding a reflective practice is a catalyst for pausing, noticing and acting, a catalyst for awareness and purposeful action.

Reflective practice helps us cultivate more nourishing and transformative ways of being and doing. By breaking the reactive loop we can offer fresh possibilities as an alternative to reactive habits.

### Calls for Action

- Reflect on whether your requirements are other's constraints.
- Create space for deep learning that happens outside of planned process
- Bring in more of your whole self
- Acknowledge one's position and power



Time to  
Reflect

## 2. Time to Relate

We have often been working in silos, separated from each other, with power holding perspectives and power-holding structures dominating. It's time to work more relationally, embrace the humans behind the work and come together in partnership.

It takes time to relate, build relationships and co-create. The Inquiry found centering relational collaborations extremely impactful and transformational – and it was hard to do. Working relationally is often against the dominant narrative so requires time, support and practice. There are some contexts and cultures that support this way of working. Let's learn from them, recognise and include the value of working relationally.

### Calls for Action

- Pay attention to relationships and systems
- Doing something differently includes and involves everyone
- We respond to kindness and being included
- If you're not being told your strengthening, you could be taking away



Time to  
Relate

### 3. Time to Trust

Trust has been broken because of power agendas and by us not accepting our differences. It's time to start trusting, so we can build relationships with trust at the centre. The Inquiry acknowledges the complexity of trust; it's a delicate balance of openness and vulnerability. It's not about naively trusting, but about recognizing how trust can either open doors or keep them firmly shut. We need to reflect on what conditions make us feel safe to trust and how we can build these foundations together. What do each of us need to feel confident in trusting others, and how can we cultivate that sense of security in our relationships and recognise when it isn't available.

The implication is that it takes time to trust. The Inquiry built trust with communities and individuals doing social action by being flexible with resources, needs and pace. We need to include time to listen and be accountable to what is being said.

#### Calls for Action

- Put relational work at the centre to build trust
- Be creative about how you share resources
- Accountability needs flipped



Time to  
Trust

## 4. Time to Heal

Some of our systems are causing us pain and suffering. It's time for us all to heal. It takes time to heal, so listen and be kind. There is no one way to heal. The Inquiry embedded a reflective practice, carried-out relational working and incorporated joy and self-care into its work to plant the seed for healing.

### Calls for Action

- Do more of what helps and stop doing what hinders
- Incorporate rest and bring in joy
- Communities are leading and telling their own stories. Listen deep.



Time to  
Heal



## Advancing Themes and Action Points

These themes in themselves reflect a strong desire from communities for an alternative philosophical approach to harnessing social action and a fundamental rethink to help increase levels of it, sustain it for the future and ultimately contribute to making Scotland a better place for all our people.

We suggest that to present what is a powerful case for such an approach, a thematic paper setting out the case for a different philosophy incorporating a holistic alternative approach that would underpin system change around the whole issue of social action is required. This could build on the work of Social Inquiry Scotland Co-Chairs who set out their thinking in their introduction to Social Action Inquiry Scotland.<sup>12</sup>

The paper should also set out an overarching alternative approach to policy development which incorporates both the themes and the calls for action.



Photo by Blanka Bandi

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<sup>12</sup> Helping Change Happen Guidebook, Social Action Inquiry Scotland.



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