



THE SURF AWARDS: LEARNING FROM SUCCESS

An outcomes report from a series of SURF workshops held in 2025

SURF and the Scottish Government deliver the annual SURF Awards for Best Practice in Community Regeneration to identify and share examples of high impact in addressing social and economic problems in Scottish places.

In May of 2025, SURF arranged a series of in-person [shared learning workshop events](#) with representatives of the from the [2024 process](#). The goal of these events was to explore, in some depth, what transferable lessons these projects can offer to regeneration practitioners working in other sectors and geographies.

This report presents a summary of the main outcomes from the four online SURF Awards workshop events, and their respective themes:

- Delivering housing led regeneration projects;
- Overcoming barriers to employability;
- Investing in place-based regeneration; and
- Creativity in regeneration.

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Introduction

The annual SURF Awards for Best Practice in Community Regeneration process is widely recognised as being the most prestigious awards in the broad regeneration scene in Scotland.

The purpose of the SURF Awards process is:

- To recognise and reward best practice;
- To promote and disseminate best practice across Scotland as means of sharing knowledge and experience and enhancing policy and practice;
- To highlight the role that regeneration projects and initiatives have in improving the wellbeing of individuals and communities.

2024 was the 26th year of the SURF Awards, and the 21st year that it has been delivered in partnership with the Scottish Government. Nominations to the 2024 SURF Awards were assessed by an independent panel of 20 expert judges drawn from national regeneration related organisations and community groups in Scotland. Working in teams, the judging panel members agreed category shortlists, made site visits to these shortlisted projects, and collaboratively selected winning projects.

The five category winning projects for the 2024 SURF Awards were:

- **Creative Regeneration:** [Narture CIC](#)
- **Removing Barriers to Employability:** [DFN Project SEARCH Ninewells](#)
- **Community Led Regeneration:** [Bute Community Forest](#)
- **Improving Scotland's Places:** [Molendinar's Flourishing](#)
- **Housing and Regeneration:** [Kirkhope Steading](#)

These winning projects were announced at a SURF Awards Presentation Dinner event in the Voco Grand Central Hotel in Glasgow on the 5th December. SURF invited colleagues in all five winning projects to participate in a series of SURF Awards shared learning workshop events with regeneration practitioners from the SURF network. You can read about all of the 2024 SURF Award projects in the [SURF Awards Publication](#).

The events were designed to explore and highlight the main factors that led to the success of the 2024 SURF Award winning initiatives that could potentially help initiatives in other contexts and places.

The following sections of this report highlight the main areas of discussion and outcomes from the following three themed events in the series:

- **Delivering housing led regeneration projects** Kirkhope Steading, Water Row Phase 1, An Faire Mor Housing, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA), and Scotland's Housing Network. Held on 1 May 2025 in Riddles Court, Edinburgh.
- **Overcoming barriers to employability** DFN Project SEARCH Ninewells, Fife Gingerbread's Lone Parents Poverty and Work Programme, Glasgow Life's Family Finances Key Workers programme, Third Sector Employability Forum (TSEF), and Scottish Government. Held on 8 May 2025 in the Kinning Park Complex, Glasgow.
- **Investing in place-based regeneration** with Molendinar's Flourishing, Bute Community Forest, Scotland's Towns Partnership, and Scottish Futures Trust. Held on 15 May 2025 in the Civic House, Glasgow.
- **Creativity in regeneration** with Narture CIC, Creative Recovery Inverclyde, Music Broth, Creative Scotland, and Culture Counts. Held on 22 May 2025 in Glasgow Women's Library.

SURF is grateful to the Scottish Government for supporting the SURF Awards process, including these workshop events. The 2024 SURF Awards process also benefited from the support of the following additional partners in the delivery of thematic categories: [Creative Scotland](#), [Scotland's Towns Partnership](#) and [Scottish Procurement Alliance](#).

Transferable Lessons

1) Delivering housing led regeneration

With introductory presentations from SURF Award winning and shortlisted projects:

Kirkhope Steading, Water Row Phase 1, and An Faire Mor Housing.

Additional input was provided by SURF partners [Scottish Federation of Housing Associations \(SFHA\)](#) and [Scotland's Housing Network](#).

About the event

The first workshop in the series highlighted the 2024 SURF Award Winner and Highly Commended projects in the 'Housing and Regeneration' category.

The projects featured all used housing-led regeneration approaches to improve the communities in which they work.

First Presentation Summary: [Kirkhope Steading](#)

Presenter: Vicky Davidson, Project Manager, Ettrick and Yarrow Community Development Company

The development is situated in Ettrickbridge, a very rural area between Selkirk, Hawick and Innerleithen, in the Scottish Borders.

The project officially started in 2018 but the Ettrick and Yarrow Community Development Company, who have been a charity since 2013, had been looking at the steading property prior to that.

The organisation began the project at a good starting point with an ideal location identified and a willing seller. They secured an old farm steading and worked to keep the same footprint of the building as part of the new designs. They could add on to the building but only within planning for countryside guidelines. The new development consists of five affordable homes for rent, consisting of three 3-bed houses and two 2-bed homes, and a business unit containing four workshop spaces.

The organisation was particularly fortunate to have a strong board with skills to help deliver the project, including the Treasurer who had previously been an architect for the local council. However, they decided on using the contractor's Site Manager rather than recruiting for the role themselves.

They delivered the project during the pandemic which proved to provide big differences in the tenders they received, with £1m of a difference between the top and bottom quotes. They settled on using a local firm. The findings of the original structural survey of the roof were incorrect and it needed to be replaced. However, re-roofing allowed them to raise the ceiling height which was an added bonus as steadings can be quite narrow.

The houses have been constructed to an eco-friendly design. Each house has 5kw of PV and battery, and an individual borehole for the heating source.

Due to the pandemic the trusses were built on site. The team found that small decisions took the longest, for example deciding on the pink render on the windows. Families moved in just before Christmas 2022. The build was only meant to take one year but it was delayed. One delay was due to the split funding needed to deliver the project. The [Rural Housing Fund](#) only funds housing not business units, so other funding had to be sought.

One of the main reasons for doing a housing project was to retain the local school. The Housing Allocation Policy reflected that need, with a point system weighted in favour of age, children, connection to local area or working in the area, which they borrowed from North West Mull. It was a popular decision within the community to use this policy, and has even resulted in one new resident restarting the local bowling club. They still have one space to let within the business unit.



The group had help from the [Scottish Land Fund](#), which also came with revenue funding. They had to go back to the Rural Housing Fund twice for more money, and were the first organisation to receive their local authority's [Second Homes Council Tax Fund](#). Finding a bank willing to provide finance for the project proved to be like finding a needle in a haystack. The [Ecology Building Society](#) were the only people who would fund the project. The team did decide to initially take some things out of the plans for cost saving but when they received some additional funding from windfarm money it allowed for some things to be put back in.

A breakdown of the funding involved included:

- Scottish Land Fund: £250,000
- Rural Housing Fund £661,000
- South of Scotland Enterprise Capital £640,000 plus £35,000
- South of Scotland Renewables Fund: £222,000
- Scottish Borders Council 2nd Homes Council Tax Fund: £157,000
- SSE Sustainable Development Fund: £80,000
- Ecology Bank Loan over 40 years £310,000
- Langhope Rig Windfarm: £20,000
- Land Purchase: £240,000
- Main Contractor: £1,987,746
- Professional Fees: £95,000
- EYCDC Project Management/Overheads: £55,000 (2 years)
- Total: £2,377,000

Through a difficult period of the pandemic they kept the developer going by providing work. All of the money was spent in the local area through local businesses.

It was difficult to deliver the project as a voluntary group without a Project Manager. There were certain areas where they had to seek external support. At the pre-acquisition phase this included things such as carrying out a Housing Needs Survey, site investigations and survey work, architect feasibility studies with preferred option and costs, and advice on procurement. The Housing Needs Survey was carried out by Rural Housing Scotland. Having an architect on their Board helped with some areas of pre-acquisition tasks.

At the planning stage they also needed further support with areas such as liaising with design teams and architects, and working with utilities companies.

Throughout the project the team had to report regularly to the Board and ensure that stakeholders and the community were kept informed. They also had to provide updates to funders and lenders, when required. They sourced some outside support to ensure that they were meeting both health

and safety, and legal compliance requirements. They also needed advice on VAT as it was going to be a big additional cost.

The project was really lucky with funders and having a strong board. They had heard of a project where the Board pulled out when they heard they had to borrow money but this Board were aware from the start.

Interest rates on the loan have gone up but they pre-empted this and went back to funders so they borrowed less. The team are now thinking about [community shares](#) as an option to pay back the mortgage.

They were lucky but they also worked hard to make sure that luck was in place, taking the Board with them and capitalising on available skills. They had to sell the project to the community and get support. You should never underestimate the package you need to pull together to do all of that. You need to think about the whole picture and how you sit within the community.

Now that the development is complete, some of services have been taken in-house, such as tenancy management, as they can't afford to have them otherwise.

[View presentation slides](#)

Second Presentation Summary: [Water Row Phase 1](#)

Presenter: Jamie Mallan, Director of Community Enterprises, Water Row Company

Jamie opened by noting that although there is a contrast between the rural and urban setting, urban development comes with its own challenges in terms of housing.

Govan is steeped in heritage and history, with notable landmarks such as Govan Old and Doomsday Hill sitting adjacent to the new housing development. The Water Row site had been marked as strategically important for Glasgow City Council and has been in development for 20-25 years.

The housing is located on a site which was previously used as a carpark but now houses a development with 92 two-bedroom mid-market rent flats. Mid-market rent was chosen as it provides affordable homes for those who don't meet social housing need. This choice has kept people in Govan who would otherwise have had to move away from the area. The development adopted a placemaking approach from the start and incorporated six business units into the designs, looking to create a vibrant place to live and work, with public realm upgrades providing an attractive place for people to sit and meet.

The development is situated next to the River Clyde so places it within a flood risk area. Govan Housing Group sought external support and information on navigating this. Energy efficiency was an important element of the site. The development was meant to be the first Passivhaus design in Glasgow but it is just off that standard.

It was a prolonged process, taking over two decades to come to fruition, with various partners involved. Glasgow City Council owned the site and wanted to do something with it, developing a flagship location.

Housing was chosen in response to community need. Water Row is an important site both historically and locally, so community input was integral to moving the project forward. The end result shows off the potential of the riverside and connectivity. The new housing development and the new Govan/Partick bridge were designed as linking elements.

The team took a 'Re-imagining Govan' focus with a vision for something new. The community were keen to improve the night time economy of Govan, not just for economic reasons but also the social implications around safety in the area at night. In response, the shop units were added to the design.

A key feature of the project was community engagement, delivered through partners, such as [Central Govan Action Plan \(CGAP\)](#) and [Collective Architecture](#), and delivering on the [Townscape Heritage Initiative](#) outcomes, the [Govan/Partick Strategic Development Framework](#) and the pre-existing [Masterplan for Water Row](#). There was no consultation fatigue as every element saw delivery.

The six business units are set to include organisations such as;

- A cocktail bar;
- An artisan pie shop;
- A coffee shop with the best croissant in Scotland;
- A kitchen company; and
- A third sector organisation.



Given the changes in working environments post-Covid, the flat designs include the integration of home/office space. For environment purposes, they also include recycling facilities, photo voltaic panels on the roof, and waste water heat recovery systems. Legislation changed during the process which led to a redesign.

Govan Housing set up a new subsidiary to run the mid-market rent flats. Using the factoring role to further preserve Govan's heritage and contribute to a well maintained community. This has allowed them to

develop their role as a landlord of commercial properties, and to contribute towards placemaking in Govan. Under the new team they are able to deliver a Money Advice Service to Govan Housing Association tenants, and the wider community. This is all being delivered with a focus on [Community Wealth Building](#). They also have another subsidiary, known as the Home Team, who are responsible for maintenance of properties. Both companies will be delivering six figures back into the community this year for the first time.

Challenges

- There is a situation around vacant properties in Govan. How do they tackle that and how do they bring more businesses to Govan?
- Roof maintenance is more challenging with this development due to the pitches.
- There is a perception around being a housing association and being a social housing provider. This has led to accusations of gentrification but in reality a lot of people from Govan live in the new flats.
- On a policy level, short-term policy changes can cause complications in development, for example during the pandemic. There were several rent freezes and caps announced all within an 18-month period. There is a need for consistency. 50% of the properties were delivered before the freeze and 50% after, which has a direct effect of effective management.
- Costs to deliver and maintain housing projects are continually going up whilst the available money is going down.

Third Presentation Summary: [An Faire Mor Housing](#)

Presenter: Callum Hay, Director/Treasurer, Colonsay Community Development Company

Colonsay is a tiny island, five miles long and three miles wide, with a population of 125. It is a big job for anyone to take on a project like this but especially a community that small. [Colonsay Estate](#) have a monopoly on land and buildings on the island. There is a small primary school but they are at risk of losing it if they don't find a solution to regeneration.

There are a number of factors to consider before taking on a project of this nature. Firstly, demand versus availability and affordability. Can you meet the demand? What are the current demographic statistics for the area, and will new housing address a declining population and secure a working age group for the future? This has been a 20-year journey and is of strategic importance to the future of the island.

There had been an earlier failed attempt at buying land for housing but the bid collapsed on the day of sale. This led to the Development Company having to reform. After a successful land acquisition, they have a site with space for 24 houses. Phase one of the development consists of nine new houses, six community owned and three owned by a local business, and two business units. Four of the houses are for rental, two for shared ownership, and local business partner [MOWI](#) built three houses to help secure their existence. There are an additional three plots for self-build.

These are the most expensive 'affordable houses' ever built, which is the main challenge of developing on an island. The cost of the land was £0.5m and the development cost £3.8m, delivered with the support of five major funders.



The staff and volunteer time that goes in is astronomical. There were over 5000 hours of staff time and over 7000 hours of volunteer time dedicated to just this project. The Development Company have had support from [Highlands and Islands Enterprise \(HIE\)](#) for over 20 years, and the [Communities Housing Trust](#) also gave support to this project. Building community will and support takes patience and tenacity to get these projects over the line, as there are challenges.

These were the first affordable homes in more than a generation, which has led to a reduction in homelessness. They have provided worker housing which is supporting the local economy. If there isn't accommodation available there is no next village to go to so you need to leave the island. Businesses were looking at closure without these houses, as there was nowhere for staff to live. More than half of the properties on the island are rental homes, especially in the summer.

Delivering the project has increased community capacity, credibility and confidence, and they see a clear way forward. There has been a change in attitude and people can now see that they can do things, they are not locked in. The [Scottish Land Fund](#) have come back to give additional money for a further project with the purchase of a croft. Success breeds success.

Challenges

- Overcoming local inertia was a challenge as the community raised concerns about running out of money or the ability to sell the houses, but they delivered the project.
- There was a need to identify and manage risk. The team themselves had concerns initially about their capacity and inexperience at delivering projects of this scale.
- Delays in funding and balancing cashflow proved to be a significant challenge. There were also issues around funding inflexibility and what certain funds will and won't fund.
- The unpredictability of demand and changes in housing demand, especially post-Covid, is something that can't be controlled. The self-build plots aren't selling. Where you start might not be where you end up. One of the shared equity properties has not shifted, which affects loans etc.
- There is the ongoing challenge of asset management and financial resource for maintenance. This raises issues around long-term sustainability.
- There is a definite need to reduce dependency on volunteers to deliver these types of projects.

Lessons

- It is very tough going at times, but definitely worth it. It is perhaps not the best way to deliver housing projects, but it was the only option at the time, and it worked.
- There was a high dependence on the community's voluntary capability and this creates a vulnerability.
- You need to build political, community and funder confidence in the project, and in the team themselves. Surround yourselves with capable people.
- Allow for lots of support in the budget. It will cost more, take longer and be more difficult than you expect. Allow for that, and have plans for when things don't go to plan.
- Keep track of finances and knock-on impacts, so there are no nasty surprises. Put as much contingency in the budget as they'll let you. Stuff happens.
- Project delivery is the exciting bit, but only the beginning. You need to plan for what happens after project hand-over. That might influence the project design. They have a waste water design that can't be serviced by Scottish Water. Learned from experience.
- There is lots of help and funding for project delivery, but you are on your own with asset management. Everyone loves the new shiny thing but it is the asset management that is challenging.

Would they do it again? Not right now as they are exhausted. Demand on volunteers and the community hinges on certain people. You need to raise your voice and demonstrate that you can deliver.

Policy

- Community led projects are hard work. What can be simplified / better supported?
- Housing and enterprise funding could be better integrated.
- Like to try all-in packages: homes and workplace, to encourage relocation.
- Need a funding model that doesn't assess an organisation's managerial / financial capability. The company is required to make a contribution through commercial borrowing, which is high risk. The loan charges soak up too much critical rental income. Market rates are punitive. There's not enough left to cover asset management costs. The model seems flawed.

- The legal costs of valuations, loans, securities, ranking, and sales and leases are horrendous. How can this be simplified?
- Funding won't cover linked revenue costs, for example leases or audit. Why not? Funding from different pots for housing and business units. On islands you need to offer both.
- Funding ignores cashflow – why? Needed an emergency bridging loan from MOWI to keep things going until the funding arrived.
- Annual accounts make you look rich. You're then ineligible for other grants.
- There is a need for contracts via Scottish Government for things like asset management etc. Rather than having to procure them yourself.

This has been a 20-year process, had success with housing but feel like the stool has been kicked from under them with the management costs, which could sink the company. They generate an income of around £5k.

When you go over a certain financial threshold you need to be audited, which isn't covered by funding. This threshold is triggered by the cost of the project, something that they were unaware of, resulting in additional legal costs. The core income hasn't changed but they became unable to access certain funds due to the project funding for capital.

[View presentation slides](#)

Open Discussion

Some of the main comments and areas of discussion are listed below. These varied views and opinions do not necessarily represent the views of SURF or all of the people and organisations present at the workshop.

- *One delegate asked Jamie why they chose 2-bedroom flats.*

Jamie replied that it was where demand lay and correlated with the funding available.

- *A delegate asked Callum about the intervention of MOWI and if they will do that in other areas that they operate.*

Callum replied that they have been very supportive but not altruistic. They are keen to be good community members. Due to issues with accommodation on the island it made sense for them to be part of the project. The houses will revert to the community if they were to leave. They are easy to work with.

Euan mentioned sensitivities around issues such as MOWI investment and gentrification.

- *Callum was asked about the tenure mix and difficulties selling shared equity. Have they had a discussion?*

Callum responded that they are having that discussion now.

- *A further question to Callum asked about the future of the self-build plots.*

Callum replied that they are staying opened minded. There had been demand but it has diminished.

Vicky said that there was no funding for self-build plots with their development but they want to look at that option due to a need in the area from tradesman etc.

Calum added that they are looking at building on the plots themselves.

- *A delegate asked if it is possible to make these projects happen in larger settlements or do they only work in small communities?*

Vicky said that there are community trusts in other areas to help with this sort of thing.

Jamie said that the funding models differ between urban and rural areas.

Vicky added that some housing associations aren't interested in doing small numbers of houses so the community need to step in.

Jamie added that Govan started as a community response to plans to take properties down. They need to build to scale or the numbers don't add up.

Calum said that need and demand assessments are not the best option but the only option. The local housing association is looking to build on the island but that has been said for the last 10 years. Whatever happens in the future, they have these houses.

Vicky's colleague Marjorie added that you shouldn't make assumptions that all rural communities are nice and supportive. It is more challenging to think on a bigger scale. You need to sell a different mindset.

Calum said that the company collapsed and had to be rebuilt. What came out of that was a need for a community plan. This was 10 years ago. The plan set out what the community needs were for the future. Housing was at the top, so they were responding to community need.

Vicky said that when they formed they did a household survey. Housing came out on top. 53 people said that they knew someone who would have stayed locally if there had been housing available. If you have already lost the people who needed housing, you need to try and reach them for the Housing Needs Survey.

Marjorie added that you need to line up partners. There were six pupils left in the school. This isn't attractive in case it closes, so the group got the boundaries for the school catchment area changed and as a result the nursery reopened. Don't assume it is just the usual suspects.

Calum added that the new housing is home to residents that were born on the island but had to move away.

- *The projects were asked if they had used a development consultant. Some of the pain could have been avoided. If not, why didn't they use one and was it advised?*

Calum said that they did and that they used [Communities Housing Trust](#). The system doesn't allow you to fund these organisations. It was almost entirely community led. They are limited as they rely on good will and some enabling funding.

Vicky said that if they hadn't had funding from the [Scottish Land Fund](#) and the [SSE Development Fund](#) they would have. It had no restrictions and didn't have to claim back in arrears. They spent the money over and over. The timing of the funding coming in was tricky as you need money to smooth the process.

Jamie said that they had one who retired during the process. They are a dying breed. It is a real challenge despite the organisation having developed properties for 50 years. Skills have been lost.

- *A delegate asked about the ideal size for a Board and if they got enough people?*

Vicky said that she started as the Chair. When they did get funding for a Project Manager it was difficult to recruit a new Chair. They have room for twelve on the Board but they are currently down to eight. They have a high turnover of volunteers. They are all people who have lived in the valley. The change of Chair provided a more natural authority and the board settled.

Marjorie added that they need to look to the future and are targeting people.

Vicky added that at the last meeting five left of the ten but they got three new trustees.

Calum said that they have a Board of ten. Eight are from the local community and two are co-opted. They are lucky with the skillset given the small number of people on the island. The project wouldn't have happened otherwise.

Euan added that there are not direct transferrable skills on a Board. It will ebb and flow.

- *A final question asked about the challenges around getting services into the area – electricity etc.*

Calum said that it is not technically difficult but they have been frustrated with the local landowner. Trying to do things without incurring extra costs.

Vicky said that they had to do boreholes as [Buccleuch Estate](#) wouldn't extend their supply. At the start they got expertise in to check that they could have boreholes, as they had issues, and it cost over £50k. Getting SPEN to connect the site delayed tenant entry.

Jamie said that despite being in an urban setting they had issues around an underdeveloped site, the subway, access to the site, and getting materials onsite.

Policy Discussion

A wider policy discussion was held and included input from Annabel Pidgeon, Policy Lead at [Scottish Federation of Housing Associations \(SFHA\)](#), and Brenda Tonner, Service Improvement Manager at [Scotland's Housing Network](#).

Euan asked both speakers to think about the policy landscape and what could happen, and does what they have heard sound correct?

Brenda said that what she heard sounded very familiar. Start-up funding has been a constant issue. There used to be seedcorn funding but even with that £50k doesn't go far. There is no support for the creation of small organisations.

Policy wise, the impact of funding having organisations working on a year to year basis needs to be tackled. There are plenty of discussions but a solution doesn't materialise. This is something that needs to be looked at.

Projects such as these are hit with hidden costs, and hidden bureaucracy and admin. New bills and policy coming in will only add to that. The skills and knowledge base is not there anymore. Skills groups that existed in the 70s and 80s have disappeared. This includes skills around compulsory purchase, that were once common.

There is so much happening and so much housing policy that it is becoming difficult to manage, especially at a voluntary level. How much longer can we rely on volunteers? It isn't a sustainable model. Reliance in volunteerism could be difficult with different controls and legislation.

Annabel opened by noting that she is also involved in [South of Scotland Community Housing \(SOSCH\)](#) so is familiar with issues at both a policy and practice level.

The challenges sound very familiar, particularly the challenges with mixed use developments. There is a need for a housing+ model. These developments contribute to economic development and support other industries in the area.

There are clear tensions between meeting standards/best practice vs meeting need. Well-resourced housing associations are having to cut full teams due to the demands of maintenance, meeting standards, and also delivering on development targets. There are increasing benchmarks around housing supply. There is a need for better resource to meet demand, and increased skills needed to deliver.

We currently don't know if the [Rural Housing Fund](#) will continue (correct at time of discussion) and there is no equivalent for urban areas. They are asking housing associations to fill the gap but this is not a long-term solution.

Euan mentioned the push for income generation but this is often not possible for charities. He gave an example of [St Paul's Youth Forum](#) who are very niche and not always replicable. He also mentioned the active [Living Rent campaign](#) but knows that for housing associations rent caps have consequences.

SURF Manifesto

Euan asked for feedback on and asks to be included in the 2026 SURF Manifesto.

- There is a need for increased funding for affordable housing. Suggested maybe using the term social housing.
- The retrofit agenda needs to be delivered without increasing costs for tenants.

Euan mentioned that no matter what people were delivering under the other themes; they are having to deal with a lack of housing. The housing crisis underpins everything. Housing is always a top need.

Euan asked if there is anything missing from the consultation findings, noting that have received comments on making self-build easier.

- The cost of building has gone up and grants haven't. People are now looking at cheaper delivery options, such as prefab, but they don't meet the needs of the [Rural Housing Fund](#).
- There needs to be a transparent and clear Housing Needs Assessment model. Had to go to the [South of Scotland Enterprise](#) agency to find Edinburgh's needs. Data is not easy to find or presented clearly. Need in Edinburgh is not due to a changing population but rather rural communities moving into the city. We have to take jobs to rural communities.
- If you don't do it voluntarily it won't get done. If communities don't do it there will be no new housing. In Langholm, there has been no new housing for 30 years. There needs to be better support for the voluntary groups, and national and local government need to understand. There needs to be a better definition of rural for those that fall through the cracks.
- There is a need for a funding model that recognises that people are starting from different places. Costings need to reflect the value that volunteers put in, as this is not recognised. Instead of spending on consultancy invest in volunteers.
- Recognise the risk communities are taking. How do we get to those policy objectives without support to build capacity? Who is in charge or responsible for retrofit?

- Short-term funding and policy decisions have led to the need for retrofit. Having to deal with those decisions now.

Euan added that community ownership works in some places but not in others. These developments are always a long-term project. It is a long slog to the delivery point. There is clear need for communities to be well supported. Some communities don't need any but others need a lot.

- The main issue with the housing crisis is supply but also affordability. Short-term commercialisation of housing stock, such as Air B&B, needs to be addressed on a macro-level. Restrict how properties can be used. Gave Barcelona as an example.

Euan mentioned [research](#) by [Centre for Cities](#) around having lots of housing being delivered leading to more affordable housing, as the market becomes oversubscribed. Delivering more housing of all tenures results in high levels of affordability.

- In some areas community led scale is really important. Partnership working is key. However, uncertain standards, funding issues, and competing priorities cause challenges. Costs will be passed to tenants for energy efficiency etc. What could a move towards community owned renewables mean? New policies coming in, targets changing etc. mean that projects can't plan beyond 1 year.
- There has been a knock on effect of private sector development. We need to prioritise rather than be widespread.
- An ambitious building programme takes time. Looking for acquisitions to fight the crisis. The NHS are asking for things but sitting on land that they won't sell. This is stopping things being done.
- Community led housing includes right and access to land.

2) Overcoming barriers to employability

With introductory presentations from SURF Award winning and shortlisted:

DFN Project SEARCH Ninewells, Fife Gingerbread's Lone Parents Poverty and Work Programme, Glasgow Life's Family Finances Key Workers.

Additional input was provided by SURF partners [Scottish Government](#) and the [Third Sector Employability Forum \(TSEF\)](#).

About the event

The second workshop in the series highlighted the 2024 SURF Awards Winner and Highly Commended projects in the 'Removing Barriers to Employability' category.

The projects featured are all using techniques to support dis-engaged people into employment, training and further education.

First Presentation Summary: [DFN Project SEARCH Ninewells](#)

Presenters:

- *Leanne Macdonald, Lecturer Access and Supported Education, Dundee and Angus College*
- *Louise Henderson, Curriculum and Quality Leader Access and Supported Education, Dundee and Angus College*
- *Neslihan Osmanalli, Employment Support Worker, Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership*

What is key to the success of the DFN Project SEARCH model is the partnership approach. The three key partners are [NHS Tayside](#), [Dundee and Angus College](#) and [Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership](#), with an additional link to the local authority.

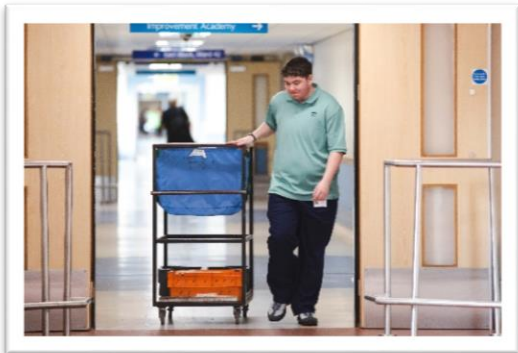
DFN Project SEARCH is not a new concept and the model is used in various ways in other areas of Scotland, but it is new to Dundee. Dundee and Angus College approached NHS Tayside to take on the role of the employer.

The programme runs as a 36-week transition programme, targeted at people aged 16-35 with additional support needs and/or autism. Only 4.1% of people with learning disabilities who are known to local authorities go on to secure paid employment, compared to 80% of their peers, so it was clear that there was a need for a pathway programme to increase success rates. The DFN Project SEARCH programme, on average across the UK, has provided a 70% success rate in getting people into 'proper jobs.'

Interns start in August with mandatory training, where they are treated like any other new employee. They are not tins of beans, they are people with different needs and personalities. They take part in three workplace rotations based on the interests of that intern. The rotations help to build transferrable skills, as well as finding areas of interest.

Each intern is fully trained into the role by the Job Coach or Lecturer. The team have adopted a train and fade approach where the aim is to have the intern blended into the environment with everyone else. A department mentor is in place to look out for them and provide support. The Project SEARCH team are on hand for feedback sessions at the start and end of each day. It is about social observations and changes as well as on the job capability.

As the rotations develop the interns take on advanced tasks and engage in shift work patterns to mimic actual employment. Interns are fully supported into employment, including things such as support with job searching, writing CVs, and interview training. There is also post course support available, particularly to those who don't get employment straight away or those who may want to look elsewhere for employment.



The team gave a case study example. Bradley had been 27 and lacked self-confidence. Despite having gone to college he had remained unemployed. After his college journey ended he was just online gaming and wasting his potential. He built up volunteer experience within the employment service to build skills. He struggled to attend the Project SEARCH open day as it was just too overwhelming for him, so the team done some adjustments to allow him to take part. He was initially placed in the laundry but that didn't suit. He had been

good at science at school so lab work seemed appropriate, especially given his keen attention to detail. His manager's feedback to the team was very positive, he had processed 7000 samples in one month with no mistakes. However, there was no position available when he graduated in May so he kept working with the employability team. The main barrier was the interview process. The team provided support and he is now employed in the hospital lab.

They enrol eight graduates each year. Of the eight interns in the class of 2022, all eight graduated with seven going into employment and one into volunteering. It was the same in 2023. At the time of presenting the 2024 class were due to graduate that month. At that point five were already in employment and two were waiting to hear back from interviews.

Challenges

It is always about making sure the opportunity is right for that person at that time. The recruitment process within the NHS is really long and tiresome, which can be frustrating. New recruits can wait up to four months, from time of interview, to actually start the job.

The team feel that they are battling against a Scottish wide system, with nationalised elements like Jobtrain and HR. They find opportunities for feedback where they can. It is a system you can't control but can tweak. For example, they worked with an intern who was dyslexic and the system is not really friendly towards these needs.

Challenging barriers and challenging decision making doesn't make you popular but it has got some of the interns into jobs. There can be a lack of understanding of intern 'quirks'. It is about educating the wider group. A lot of the governance and procedures that are in place can hinder processes as it is so tight that you can't breathe. If it was less rigid things could grow and progress.

When you bring three organisational cultures together it can cause friction, and has been a learning curve. They are working on a cultural understanding. They didn't expect to come across these issues but they are working on them.

Successes

They can recognise where elements are being embedded into policy, which helps to break down barriers and advocate for the interns that they work with.

There has been a change in leadership, and with that culture, at Ninewells which has made a big difference, and with time that ethos will trickle down. They are seeing real support from the senior

management, and a willingness to be involved and to get to know the interns and understand how the programme operates.

A Disability Inclusion Working Group has been created, which the partners all sit on, and NHS Tayside has become a Disability Confident Leader.

The profile of the course is being raised. They have been invited to attend and speak at Parliament, taking along interns to be part of that experience and give them a chance to tell their story and show their progression. They have also won awards, recognising the impact of the project.

The partners are all firmly invested in the sustainability of the project and the employed interns. There are positive outcomes for everyone involved. Funding is secure to continue the project into the future.

The aftercare programme is key to the success of the project. No one is left behind when the placement comes to an end. Support continues even into employment, including if the person wants to change jobs or look at other options around training and education.

It is what they do as education and it is a tried and tested system, that genuinely changes people's lives.

[View presentation slides](#)

Second Presentation Summary: [Lone Parents, Poverty & Work](#)

Presenter: Louise Park, Project Coordinator - Lone Parents, Poverty & Work, Fife Gingerbread

This programme, delivered by Fife Gingerbread, is bridging the gap between lone parents and work.

Louise provided a quote from one of the participants:

"Before I started this, I felt depressed, trapped, hopeless. Like I was being punished for being a lone parent. Guilt and shame for not being able to find a flexible job to provide for my son."

It was clear from feedback that they were receiving that it was time to ask employers to be part of the solution to child poverty.

Fife Gingerbread have been providing frontline employability services since 2013 but they wanted to do more and change the system. The programme was born from frontline experience of poverty and employability gaps. It was launched in 2022 to promote "lone parent positive workplaces" in Fife. It looks to change workplace culture rather than the individual, collaborating with brave employers to challenge the status quo.

The model is a supported, relationship-based approach that partners with inclusive employers to provide paid, flexible placements for lone parents, building confidence, skills, and pathways into sustainable employment.

It was first tested in 2023 within Fife Council and a partnership with [Fife Jobs Contract Life Chances Scheme](#). Fife Gingerbread then explored roles within social care, placing four lone parents into flexible auxiliary roles, such as maintenance, catering, and activity coordination, within a local care home. In 2024, they collaborated with the education department at Fife Council to explore pupil support roles.

Each placement is for six months. It starts with an inclusive and collaborative recruitment process, that takes into account both employer requirements and lone parent needs. The next stage is barrier

removal, which is done on an individual basis. Barriers can include transport, childcare, financial constraints or health conditions.

The first four weeks consist of a pre-employment induction, carried out by a Fife Gingerbread Project Coordinator. This helps build peer support around elements such as team building and communication skills. They will consider upskilling where required. Following the conclusion of the induction period the participants will move onsite for the remainder of the six-month placement.



The Fife Gingerbread team will provide group support and development sessions to review any challenges and aim to address them. They take a very person-centred approach. The hope is that at the end of the six months the participants will secure jobs or go on to a positive destination, however the support does not end when the placement ends.

The PSA traineeship, which was part of the SURF Award application, is a co-designed programme with lone parents and partners. It was important that it worked for both parents and employers. Barrier removal has been key to its success. For example, there are no breakfast clubs at some of the schools so employment start times can be an issue. In discussion with the employer they changed times to suit school needs. Another barrier can be that participants living in small villages can have issues with access to transport. Participants receive holistic wrap around support from the beginning. There are opportunities for career progression and access to qualifications. The team hold development sessions to discuss next steps. One change for this programme was direct support from partners who had a focus on the career journey.

Outcomes

- 3 parents are now in full-time school roles.
- 1 is in part-time work at a school nearer home.
- 1 is in a part-time supply role.
- 4 joined the supply list.
- All 9 parents are pursuing further qualifications.
- Strong peer networks and higher confidence.
- There has been learning within the services and partners to enhance the project further.

Fife Gingerbread are in conversations with Fife College on how to support participants to gain further qualifications. There has been lots of learning, for example there were HR process and culture issues apparent from the start. They are now looking to replicate the programme at the end of summer 2025.

Louise provided another quote from a participant:

"I have had the best 6 months' experience ever, from doing the pre-placement training to my paid-placement I've enjoyed every step, I also made friends along the way and really got out my comfort zone, I've loved having [Fife Gingerbread] support us and cheer us on whatever we've been doing ..."

A person centred approach to employability means that Fife Gingerbread are more likely to get better outcomes for parents and for employers.

Since 2023, the Lone Parents, Poverty & Work programme has helped to place 26 lone parents into paid-placement opportunities using the Fife Gingerbread traineeship model.

- 17 completed placements and moved into a sustainable job/or positive outcome. Positive outcomes can include further education.
- 3 are continuing placements in Fife Leisure Trust.
- 3 are just starting their journey with sustainable third sector organisation Greener Kirkcaldy.

Moving forward the team would like to engage with other sectors and upscale the programme. They are in discussions with NHS Fife to replicate the model there. They are also working on a new project centred around lone parent voices.

Louise closed with one final quote:

“I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to be part of this project and will be forever in debt to Fife Gingerbread for their continued support throughout this process. Thank you for allowing me to pursue the career I have always dreamed of, and in doing so become a better parent to my son.”

Employability is more than statistics; it is directly linked to tackling child poverty and improving lives.

[View presentation slides](#)

Third Presentation Summary: [Family Finances Key Workers](#)

Presenter: Marlene Bryceland, Family Finances Project Manager, Glasgow Life

The Family Finances Key Workers service, delivered by Glasgow Life, is a 1:1 intensive mentoring service to help families manage finances, adopting a person centred approach.

Since 2013, child poverty has been rising and in 2022, in Scotland, 61% of working age adults and 68% of children were living in poverty in a household where someone is in employment. It was clear that working families are also experiencing poverty. The team at Glasgow Life work with families in and out of employment. Glasgow has the highest rates of poverty in Scotland. Research has shown that if you experience poverty for the first seven years of life you live 20 years less; you will be 20% below the standard level for cognitive skills; and four times more likely to develop mental health issues by the age of 11. You will also be more likely to develop meningitis and respiratory illness.

The French photographer, Raymond Depardon, once working in Glasgow, noted that the people of Glasgow are warm, welcoming, and have a great sense of community.

The primary groups receiving support through the service fall under the following categories:

- Lone Parents -45%
- Disabled Parents - 18%
- Child with a disability - 16%
- Parent with 3+ children - 32%
- Minority Ethnic - 66%
- Youngest Aged < 1 Years - 10%
- Mothers Aged <25 Years - 9%

These groups are those most at risk of falling into poverty. It is quite a wide target group so the team have to work with multiple partners to provide necessary support, alongside the mentoring support. Partners are able to help to support barrier removal, such as providing clothes etc.

Glasgow Life works with [Money Matters](#) to combine elements to help support people into work but also to gain better budgeting skills. They receive referrals through partners or self-referral. They start by assigning a Key Worker and addressing immediate crisis, such as food and fuel poverty. They keep the connection moving towards talk of employment.



They are willing to meet at a place and time suitable to the individual. They have various Glasgow Life venues but are also happy to meet at a coffee shop etc. The team can meet in the evenings and weekends as well. Support is offered at the individual's pace, for as long as they wish, and at a date and time that suits them.

The Holistic Needs Assessment and Action Plan look at what barriers are preventing progression, and then see what existing partners can support with that. They aim not to duplicate services. This can mean that sometimes

multiple partners are involved but a Key Worker is the 'golden thread' holding that together. The Key Worker is there every step of the way as the main point of contact.

Glasgow Life have access to a training and support fund. For example, they paid for a driving instructor course for an individual who wanted to pursue that career, and the man is now working as an instructor.

They work with partners across the city and are willing to link with anyone who can provide appropriate support.

Outcomes

- Parents supported to secure employment achieved a combined uplift in annual earned income of £1,785,000.
- They have supported 306 parents to access level 2 financial support (complex situations affecting benefits, debt resolution etc.) and a further 143 parents to access one-off support (fridges, mattresses, DHP).
- 202 parents secured a learning outcome (work related qualification Higher/Further education qualification etc).
- 88 parents have been supported into employment.

Marlene concluded with the case study example of Melissa, a 42-year-old mother with four children, aged 16 and under. When she first engaged with the Family Finances Team, she was working part-time on a zero hours' contract and had spiralling debts. She was stuck in a cycle of poverty which was affecting her confidence and the overall wellbeing of herself and her family. Her eldest daughter was planning to leave school to get a job to help with the household income.

As a direct result of support from her Key Worker she has secured full time employment, paid off her debts, purchased a car and has some savings in the Credit Union. Her household income has increased by £1,900 per month. Melissa has recently secured a mortgage to purchase her own home. Her eldest daughter is now staying on at school, studying to obtain the Highers she needs to meet the conditional offer she has for Strathclyde University.

The work that goes in underneath, such as the food and fuel poverty support, is crucial to delivering positive outcomes. They are also now providing counselling support, where required.

[View presentation slides](#)

Open Discussion

Some of the main comments and areas of discussion are listed below. These varied views and opinions do not necessarily represent the views of SURF or all of the people and organisations present at the workshop.

- *A delegate asked Project SEARCH if they have advice and strategies on managing red tape, and also managing expectations.*

They replied that it is key to make the interns understand the position they are in. They had someone that was rejected for interview when they had expected to get one. They challenged the decision and kept the intern updated. You need to be honest and transparent. The intern sent an email and it was actually a clerical error. Sometimes families like to be involved, in a constructive way. Keep realistic expectations and burst bubbles. Explain processes and challenges. Be honest and be there for them. Wait on them to come out of an interview and let them know that support is there. Use the tactic of 'where were they a year ago' and show them their progression. Set realistic expectations and support them to achieve them. Things like helping them to manage time etc. Timekeeping is very important and it is about making them understand that. Working around where their understanding is.

- *Another delegate asked all of the projects what general advice they would give to the private sector to help break down barriers and work more collaboratively?*

Marlene replied that it is about getting to know your potential employees. Make the little changes, to hours for example. You will get loyalty back from this.

Louise added that it is important to engage with employers and ask for changes. Employer's response is normally 'do it for one, need to do it for all.' We need to challenge this culture. Flexible and hybrid working can work well. There is a need to have policies in place that are working from the top down. There is a need for flexibility.

Euan mentioned work patterns changes post-Covid.

Neslihan said that one or two of the interns have gone on to work in the private sector. From a Health and Social Care point of view they approach the employer and see what skills are needed. Support organisations can step in and see what qualifications are needed etc. It all helps to find the right fit. Many employers are struggling to recruit. There is a need for a change in work culture to bring people in. Changes in leadership and senior management can lead to a change in culture.

Marlene added that they have links to Govan and offered an opportunity to connect.

- *The next question asked if they have relationships with employers that allow them to upskill and get potential employees work ready. Can they get work experience prior to the interview?*

Leanne responded that it is the concept of Project SEARCH. She gave the example of Lucy gaining transferrable skills before getting a placement at the switchboard. She still had to go through the interview and prep for that but she had experience to give examples. Their young people need the time to get to grips with things.

- *Euan interjected and asked if they get feedback from the interviews.*

Leanne replied that they encourage the interns to ask and then the team analyse and implement the feedback.

Louise replied to the initial question saying that participants are on a six-month placement within the sector with the employer. They encourage employers to see the participants as people as well as new employees. The ambition is that they have been interviewed as have been there on placement for 6 months. They would like to remove the interview process.

- *A question asked about triage. People need jobs but there are a host of other issues going on. Do they have support?*

Leanne replied that if needed they fill the void of home support and meet their needs. They also have a good relationship with occupational health and support with money advice.

Louise said that when lone parents move into jobs it isn't always 'got a job so everything is great.' There is a need for flexible and compassionate work places. You need to meet people where they are and provide holistic support. Participants go through other aspects of Fife Gingerbread's services, if required.

Marlene added that because the Key Worker has a monitoring role they become like a listening ear for people who might not have support.

- *Euan asked if they are handling more poverty related issues. Is it a growing need or has it always been there?*

Marlene replied that year on year they are seeing more people but they don't know if it is growing need or that they now know that the service is there.

Louise added that they are in the same position. They were stuck in a cycle where parents were meeting the same barriers so continually stuck in a cycle of poverty.

Leanne said that it's about the same level but it is a case for case basis. The College can support with hardship loans. They are having to provide greater support with changes to the benefits system.

Policy Discussion

A wider policy discussion was held and included input from Blyth Deans, Member of the [Third Sector Employability Forum \(TSEF\)](#), and Megan Rae, Parental Employability Support - Policy Manager at the [Scottish Government](#).

Euan asked both speakers to think about the policy landscape and what could happen, and does what they have heard sound correct?

Blyth commented on being a SURF Award judge noting that it is key to get to speak to the individuals who have been supported.

Third Sector Employability Forum (TSEF) is a community of interest for organisations that provide employability support. They have around 300 members, who are not always delivering purely employability services. They represent the sector and have an opportunity to comment on policy through their lobbying role. They have no funding and work on a voluntary basis but recently there were three funded posts seconded in the Scottish Government. One links with TSEF, and the other two with [COSLA](#) and the [Improvement Service](#).

TSEF got involved in the Scottish Government discussion events last year around their employability strategy. The main policy is [No One Left Behind](#). There were discussion events to gauge how that was working in practice and a new [Strategic Plan](#) launched a year ago.

In those discussions funding was raised as a main issue, and not just the lack of but also how it is delivered, and one-year funding contracts making it difficult to forward plan. Also, the timescales on when you get notified on funding. These continue to be issues post Strategic Plan launch. There is a real need for multi-year funding and to know when funding will be available. The Scottish Government rely on the UK Government budget announcements. It is a circle that doesn't provide a solution.

Megan added that the government have heard the frustrations from the sector and are looking to implement accountability.

Questions

- *A question noted that the government mentions a national approach to employability. Do you know what that looks like? This was in reference to the [Programme for Government](#).*

Megan answered that discussions were in the early stages and that they can't do it overnight, it will require a partnership approach. It is under consideration so not necessarily what will happen. Ministers are looking at what options can be taken.

- *The next question linked to the first and asked about regional approaches. Different geographic areas are getting different advice. Need to include regional approaches and include those delivering them in the discussion.*

Blyth said that this came as a surprise. Approaches have been taken to local level and decisions to local authorities. This would be a move back towards the [Fair Start approach](#) maybe. Currently have 32 approaches working differently. Moving away from local approaches would be a shock to many, particularly those working city-wide having to take a national view.

Euan mentioned [living well locally/ 20 minute neighbourhoods](#). It is an expensive approach at a local level.

- *A delegate raised the issues around Scotland going through a demographic change, with an increase in the elderly population and decline in the working age group. This will present an issue going forward. It is not currently an issue in Glasgow but other areas are in decline or static. Resources are going to the elderly population. There are labour supply shortages – what will that mean for the workforce? What do you do to support the elderly population? Look at the census, if you divide those over 65 by those working in social care there are fourteen people to every one worker, and in other areas it is higher.*

Blyth said that if local authorities have high instances of ageing population you can provide programmes to support that, there are examples of that being done. The previous focus on young people support programmes may have to shift again.

Euan commented that this was mentioned at SURF's Ninewells visit. There are not enough people with skills to provide that support/care. Mentioned immigration solution.

Megan added that this is a much bigger problem than solely employability, it goes beyond that.

- *Megan said that from what she had seen from the three projects, the models work as cogs that are there and turning. She asked Project SEARCH if there are other organisations the interns can work for and asked the others about avoiding duplication.*

Marlene replied that it is core to what they do, working in partnership to avoid duplication. The Key Worker helps navigate the services. Groups all have different needs and need different services. They have regular partnership meetings at all levels – strategic, planning and delivery.

They host consultation events delivered in partnership. Key Workers build relationships with different parties. It is not about sending an email or sending a referral form, they know the person to call.

Euan mentioned that being embedded locally is key.

Leanne said that the Dundee and Angus College point of view is the need to think geographically. Would the model work in Angus, which is a rural area? How would you adapt to fit? The model is successful as all parties are engaged. Getting the right people around the table is key. Understand learning disabilities but also understand and showcase how amazing these people are. It is a supported employment model. They are formally going to review how they can have all of the support services linked together. What is best for that person – is it best to work with other parties? Mentioned the [All in Dundee](#) model.

Louse added that they are really keen to move into other sectors. They are on the same page as employers in terms of making a success of the programmes. How many employers collect data on protected characteristics? They want to create a lone parent charter, make changes and work in partnership to be more inclusive of lone parents.

Euan mentioned that lone parents are being missed in data collection on protected characteristics.

SURF Manifesto

Euan asked for feedback on and asks to be included in the 2026 SURF Manifesto.

- A lot of the challenges are local challenges. The government doesn't have a role in hyper local challenges that are about culture. The employability sector should be a major contributor to [Community Wealth Building](#).

Euan noted that the Manifesto interviews were done just before UK budget when things were looking really bleak.

- Overwhelmed by separate issues that impact on employability, such as housing.
- Mention of a pilot of multi-year funding.
- A lot of organisations don't have funding for interpreter services etc. which can impact on inclusion.
- Transport and childcare are issues that come up all the time that they aren't able to help with.
- ESOL college courses are difficult to access, and there is a real need for them. This is an issue in multiple local authority areas. More demand but struggling to find support.
- Language barriers.

3) Investing in place-based regeneration

With introductory presentations from SURF Award winning projects:

Molendinar's Flourishing and Bute Community Forest.

Additional input was provided by SURF Award partner [Scotland's Towns Partnership](#) and [Scottish Futures Trust](#).

About the event

The third workshop in the series highlighted the 2024 SURF Award Winner in the 'Improving Scotland's Places' and 'Community Led Regeneration' categories.

The projects featured at the workshop varied in location, from the urban setting of Molendinar in Glasgow to the island setting of Bute, but both struggle with disconnection, and are using place-based approaches to regenerate their communities.

First Presentation Summary: [Molendinar's Flourishing](#)

Presenter: Neil Young, Chief Executive Officer, St Paul's Youth Forum

St Paul's Youth Forum (SPYF) is based in the North East of Glasgow, working in Blackhill and Provanmill, and is in an area divided by the motorway. There is motorway on three sides and the loch on the other.

Historically the area had been home to a distillery, mill, and canal, which had been the main focus. Then regeneration came and the area became the new place to be for people from Garngad, poverty quickly followed. In the 1950-80s the area was fuelled by infamous gang related issues, including bombings.

Neil shared a short film clip about their work. This can be viewed [here](#).

Some areas that they are working in fall overall within the bottom 2% of SIMD statistics, and others within the bottom 5%. To change things locally you have to have a local team, and 2/3 of the staff live within the community and are invested in making things better.

Transport is a major issue in the area, both reliability and cost, resulting in transport poverty. Bikes are a solution and they also tackle health inequalities. However, there are only three bike stations in the wider area, meaning that the community was at a disadvantage from the offset.

SPYF were part of the [Scottish Government pilot scheme](#) to give away new bikes. They gave away a total of 750 bikes to people in the community. It is key to get people involved from an early age and get them interested in bike maintenance. SPYF have also setup a bike shop at [Golf It](#), a local partner who moved into the area beside the loch. Here people can trial a variety of bikes, including adapted bikes for people with disabilities. The money generated from the sale of these bikes is reinvested into the local community. The team have also developed a partnership with the Royal and Ancient Golf Course, a key site in the local area.

Affluent areas get things first. So the team decided to be proactive with the Molendinar's Flourishing proposal. Creating the Langdale Street design proposal was a community suggestion. They wanted to stop lorries going past the school. They used tools such as Minecraft to get young people interested and involved. The plans are currently at [Sustrans](#) stage 4 and waiting on the council to move things forward. When complete it will cost £4m.

The three aims agreed for the proposal were:

- **Creative:** It would include imaginative things which the community would love, but might never have thought of themselves.
- **A (Better) Place for Everyone:**
 - It needed to consider the needs of different people in the community, and include things for everyone.
 - It would feel like it belonged to the community and be something they would all be proud of, as then people would care for it more, and not litter and vandalise it.
 - It could “give back” something to locals (e.g. food).
 - It would make the place safer, cleaner and more beautiful for those who live there and use it.
- **Buildable:** It should be possible to build any of the imaginative things they come up with.

The Blackhill Grows project centres around addressing local food insecurity. People don't know what to do with good food so there is a need to educate. On a piece of disused land, they created polytunnels and set up a home for some chickens. They sell some of the produce and have established a food fence so that people can walk past and pick fruit etc. There is no lock or gate as it belongs to the community.

SPYF run a twice weekly community meal which provides a space for people to cook and come together to share food. They run a holiday food programme in the summer to help address the impacts of food poverty. The team are in the process of building an urban farm on land from Glasgow City Council that is situated beside a local school.



Through [People Make Glasgow Communities programme](#), SPYF took on the Molendinar Community Centre via a 'try before you buy' approach from Glasgow City Council. They were given the keys two years ago. They quickly established that there are a lot of hidden costs, such as maintenance, utilities etc. For example, there was a £75k utilities cost and the budget was £25k. The takeover has had a huge impact and they have tripled the Glasgow Life footfall.

Youth work has always been at the core of what they do. They take young people out of the city to other parts of Scotland and abroad, including Africa and Iceland, to broaden their horizons and provide learning opportunities. They have tackled youth crime, initially to prevent deaths, by providing alternative activities designed by young people.

National research on happiness produced a graph that stated only 1 in 5 women are happy. They are now moving their focus on tackling gender based violence, and are linking with a project in Iceland. This started as a game and has now been developed into a tool consisting of a beach ball.

What has happened within the community is real transformation and served as a beacon of hope.

[View presentation slides](#)

Second Presentation Summary: [Bute Community Forest](#)

Presenters: Richard Whitcomb, Chair, Bute Community Land Company

Bute has a population of 6000 people, and 5000 of those live in Rothesay. Deprivation levels are similar to those in the east of Glasgow, with a third of the community falling within the bottom 5% of SIMD.

The community voted in favour of buying the Forest in 2009, it had previously been part of Richard Attenborough's estate. They have 160 hectares (400 acres) of mixed birch/alder, sitka spruce plantation, and Atlantic Temperate Rainforest.

Over time aspiration wasn't realised and there were issues within the Board. Money was spent on a feasibility study but nothing came of it and the Board lost the community. There was a plan for a visitor centre, but the main issue was transparency with the community.

In 2018, Richard and three others joined the Board, whilst two existing members stepped down. There was a discussion about handing back the Forest by the old Trustees but the new Trustees said no. They decided to refocus on two main objectives; community engagement and education, and environmental restoration.

They started small and manageable and focussed on the asset itself, the Forest. They started to connect people to the Forest, noting that it is there if you have a group and want to use it. They worked with existing groups to get people to the Forest. Bute has a strong community.

The team took on their first capital project in 2021 with Covid Recovery Funding. The project was the off grid huts. They kept clear messaging throughout to the community and really focussed on engagement.

They made use of existing expertise on the island and actively engaged with refugee communities, some of whom had previously been housed via Fyne Homes programme to relocate Syrian refugees. They held story wagon events as a way to engage.

The group sought to engage with local young people and held a youth theatre project in the Forest. They looked at different ways to engage, for example a project with ultra violet torches at night in the Forest.



The Branching Out programme was a mental health project that involved a structured 12-week programme. It created a cliff-edge for some when it ended but through volunteers they developed the Blether and Brew project to give an alternative option.

All of the projects celebrate the unique aspects of the Forest with a variety of events, including the opening of the roundhouse, building a birdbox, barbeques, and arts and wellbeing workshops. They established an outdoor learning programme, engaging with three primary

schools and two nurseries, with a total of 400 pupils aged 11 years and under. Samuel started in 2021 and works with the young people. He is a champion of nature and a huge resource for the organisation.

What they have now is an improved asset via the forest infrastructure. The Charcoal Huts were delivered by funding from [Highlands and Islands Enterprise \(HIE\)](#) and a local developer, and have proved to be very popular and cover their own costs.

Volunteers built the roundhouse, a popular attraction within the forest that is also used for the school's work. They engage volunteers and work with the local job centre to provide opportunities, such as fixing the board walks throughout the Forest.

They have received [HIE](#) and [National Lottery Heritage Fund](#) money to build a visitor centre and develop a parking area. They are also creating a new woodland through intense biodiversity. They aim to add an additional 20 species to the area.

Learning

- The community comes first – it is their Forest, their asset.
- That community means all communities – refugees, those with mental health difficulties, families from deprived areas, retirees, young adults etc.
- Be clear in the overall vision/aim but also be flexible on the how you get there.
- Engage and communicate, tell the community what you are doing and why. Engage with detractors.
- Celebrate successes, share good news and things that work well.
- Deliver and demonstrate – small, tangible and delivered projects and activities are better than speculative plans
- Be entrepreneurial but work with the grain of what is happening – be realistic, have the money, and be deliverable. Use things like letters of support.
- Partnership working is critical – it is a cliché, but it works.
- Show leadership, drive and commitment – believe in your cause.
- Be excellent and be humble.

Communication is key. Use things like newsletters, an AGM etc. This wasn't happening before and partly why the project didn't work originally. Take people through a journey.

[View presentation slides](#)

Open Discussion

Some of the main comments and areas of discussion are listed below. These varied views and opinions do not necessarily represent the views of SURF or all of the people and organisations present at the workshop.

- *A delegate said that speakers had spoken about [SIMD statistics](#) and highlighted that in several months' time the 2024 scoreboard comes out. Why do we expect that we are deprived? It is how funding is allocated. Politically not doing anything. Only get funding through being deprived – how do you challenge this approach?*

Neil answered that when talking about deprivation the starkest statistic is that by moving 300m it has increased his life expectancy by 25 years. How do we level the board? It is a challenge from when you are born. Statistically we have challenges but we also have solutions. Can see a tangible difference from the work they do but will it lead to a rise in life expectancy? Statistically we don't know but we can point to people who are alive because of the project. There is a need for more resources. Partnership in projects is key, as you can't do it alone. There are so many challenges but so many people with solutions. Likes to call it 'magpieing' - taking and using solutions from other people. There is something in how we speak about it and the language used. He gave an example of a woman saying that she is not poor as 50 years ago she didn't have a carpet and now she does. We need to keep pushing for support.

Euan mentioned the need for statistics but also outcomes.

- *An attendee noted that they had been doing the work for a long time and asked what shifts they see in the system to stop perpetual cycles?*

Neil answered that they constantly feel like they are banging their heads against a brick wall. Is it getting better or is it not? It is about hope and about celebrating. Saying that we said we would do it and we have. You should always under promise and over deliver, this is where monitoring and evaluation comes in. See what the great things are and what can be improved. The more people involved in tackling the challenges, the more people involved in the celebration.

Richard added that you need to help people to think differently, especially young people. Change perspective and aspirations, allow them to play a part.

- *Euan asked about the effect on children attending the Forest.*

Richard said that the classroom is not always the best place for them. The Forest provides an opportunity to take the lead, learn responsibility, and develop teamwork skills. It builds confidence and enhances their relationship with the natural world.

- *The speakers were asked to expand on the difference around community engagement and national government engagement?*

Richard responded that they had to work hard to overcome detractors bringing up things from the past. They had to do things differently and tell people how it was different. They held public engagement events when it came to felling some of the trees, which is not popular. They were open about it and actively engaged. It helped them to tell the story. They have seen groups shy away from properly engaging with communities but they have taken the initiative to do things and raise their profile.

Neil stated that community engagement is really easy for them as they are a community organisation. The community turn up for events etc. Free food is always a draw. Community groups come together to celebrate partnership. With the Flourishing Molendinar consultation, they explained what they were doing, chatted about options, and came back taking responses on board. In terms of government support, two Scottish Government Ministers and a Cabinet Secretary have visited the project in the last six months. It is all great until you ask for money. Where can you get to beyond one-year funding? On the 1st April they didn't have any funding confirmed, everyone in the third sector is on a shoogly nail. Need to look at the cost of the criminal justice system vs cost of prevention. The government are keen to engage and learn but less so to put their hands in their pockets.

- *Another delegate asked about local authority support. Policy is good but practice less so – not supportive of community interest. Have you had to juggle different local authority plans?*

Richard answered that they have looked for opportunities where funding will support what they do, rather than shoehorn. It is a constant struggle to draw in funding. The local authority is broadly supportive but what does that actually mean? They administer some funding pots for certain activities. Something is wrong with the system.

Neil added that they do good stuff with the government, both local and national. There are good policies and if there is money in the system then if they could they would. There is now less money but greater need, but also more solutions too. In terms of the negatives, the community centre burnt down in 2001. The insurance money led to a £2m building designed by the community in 2006, the perfect building to meet community need. What the community got though was what the council wanted, their building design. Now they have a facility that is less than 20 years old and needs a new roof due to bad design. A positive is the Flourishing Molendinar project. St Paul's went with a design and they were really supportive and are getting

it done, a complete grassroots approach. Now it is leading to changes in how the council do things, an example being [The Avenues](#) project.

- *A delegate asked about long and short-term future needs.*

Richard said that with the school work teenagers are harder to reach. It is going well with primary age but struggling to engage with secondary age pupils. Long-term, having a Forest that is literally working for the community and is sustainable. In the short-term, the delivery of the visitor hub is the main focus. The Forest will never finish as a project, as it is nature.

Neil added that they aim to have alleviated the effects of poverty by 2027. The urban farm has been stalled due to delays with Scottish Water getting water to the site, it has taken 18 months. The community have always wanted a football pitch so they are working with the council to get that delivered. There are bigger challenges around ASN support within local schools. There is a real need to adapt and change programmes to help people to learn. How do we educate people to understand their capabilities? To understand their diagnosis and different systems? We need to get people into jobs and break down barriers.

- *A final question asked Neil about the 'try before you buy' approach with the Molendinar Centre. Noting previous issues with asset transfers being 'pigs in pokes.'*

Neil said that it took them two years to get permission to occupy. They were initially going to take the building for one year and then realised the roof issue that needs fixed before any handover. A year on and it is still not fixed. The council can't find a roofer. Budgets given don't match reality. It is time to make changes and understand things. There are challenges with procurement, for example the costs for the council to do things vs reality - £150 to change a bulb vs £10 for a bulb. They have had good people within the council helping to manage the process and policies that need to be in place.

Euan mentioned how long-term projects need to be and that you can't short circuit success, it is a continued process.

Policy Discussion

A wider policy discussion was held and included input from Mhairi Donaghy, Vice-Chair at [Scotland's Towns Partnership](#), and Iain Wardrop, Associate Director at [Scottish Futures Trust](#).

Iain opened by saying that he works in land and property at Scottish Futures Trust (SFT). SFT is wholly owned by Scottish Government and employs around 60 people over 14 workstreams, ranging from electric vehicle chargers to provision of schools and housing. They also cover the [National Housing Trust](#) initiative and other asset related disciplines. SFT have been involved in the building of 150 schools and 25 health centres across Scotland. They are a centre of expertise. The people working in the estates team have a main focus on keeping the lights on. At the other end are properties that aren't wanted anymore, and SFT can support with the selling and disposal of these assets.

Mhairi said that Scotland's Towns Partnership (STP) are a national body for towns and villages. We already have a voice for cities but there was a gap for towns. They are funded by Scottish Government and sponsorship from the private sector. Their role is to amplify opportunities for towns. They lead on the [Scotland Loves Local](#) campaign, including the establishment of the town gift cards where money stays locally. STP also has oversight of [Scotland's Improvement Districts](#), including the well-established Business Improvement Districts and newer Community Improvement Districts. Improvement Districts have a role in establishing what is needed in places and providing a

collective voice, establishing local control. STP also liaise with government around policy and strategies.

Euan asked both speakers to think about the policy landscape and what could happen, and does what they have heard sound correct?

Mhairi said that funding is not getting easier anytime soon. It is about collectively bringing together partners at a local level and working out where your project fits within funder's priorities. Be fixed on your vision but also flexible on how you get there.

Iain added that when Scottish Government set up SFT they were tasked with driving efficiencies through infrastructure, getting the highest capital receipt for buildings and land. This has changed a lot in recent years and they are now more concerned with longer term social impact. He gave the example of the Inverness College sites located in the city centre. Previously they would have been put on the market to the highest seller but now the site consists of arts body WASPs and affordable town centre living, so the city has benefited. The Edinburgh Hospital site would normally have gone to the highest bidder but now it is affordable homes. There has been a step change.

Mhairi mentioned an outcomes based funding approach, where you get wider social benefits. There is a lot of work being done around town centre living and the benefits of that not just being economic benefits but also social, such as health, carbon offsetting etc. It is taking a whole system approach.

Questions

- *A delegate asked how they are assessing the impacts of town centre living that isn't just anecdotal?*

Iain responded that in terms of evaluation, quite a lot of press stories are misrepresentative. For example, Police Scotland having stations occupied for a long time that are now being sold. There has been a change in strategy and they now don't want to sit isolated but instead be located amongst other services. In Alloa, the previous police station had become run down but it now sits in alongside the council staff, such as social work. This shortens the customer journey and money saved due to co-location. Things are dealt with quicker. An asset strategy initiative led to local benefits.

Mhairi added that it is not going to be easy and that data is not straightforward. There is an understanding across the public sector that there is a need to make better decisions going forward. Need to think long-term and normalise data collection, focused on the impacts and spin off impacts. Gather data that does prove those outcomes. A housing programme is a partnership model and should be measuring impacts on areas such as child poverty, and health and wellbeing. It is difficult and challenging, but needs normalised.

- *Following on from that, a delegate asked if it is due to a skills deficit?*

Mhairi replied no, it is due to a data deficit.

The attendee didn't agree and mentioned low hanging fruit and out of date intuitions.

Mhairi replied that planners are not a homogenous group. Everyone wants to do the right thing. Planners are an ageing demographic within local authorities. There has been a huge drive from the Scottish Government to recruit planners for the future. We don't have the data to help people to make the right decisions. If they are not confident they will revert back to the norm. Everyone collects data for different reasons, creating a mishmash. Local places need data for that specific place.

Iain asked what does success look like? It doesn't need to be data and metrics; it can be case studies.

- *A delegate commented that to get local people into a leading role you need to look beyond the community and understand decisions coming down the chain, and how it will affect the community, but community groups are busy getting on with operational duties. In terms of place management, you need someone to find out how to deliver that and bring that to the community, to provide opportunities for young people etc. There needs to be an understanding of how it is funded vs sustainability. Don't know what that means for communities. Can't be policy down, this needs to change and be bottom up.*

Mhairi agreed that it definitely needs to be bottom up. She mentioned Community Improvement Districts bringing the community voice into decision making, and it being entirely embedded in the community, giving the example of Possilpark. The community making choices on what projects are coming forward and how they are delivered.

Iain added that it is frustrating if it is not coming from the public sector and residents, with so many organisations involved. There is a need for better joined up working.

Euan mentioned [Democracy Matters](#) and bringing control back to communities. [20 minute neighbourhoods](#) are great but expensive to do short-term. The money is not available to everyone. Mentioned preventative spend.

SURF Manifesto

Euan asked for feedback on and asks to be included in the 2026 SURF Manifesto.

Euan mentioned that the housing crisis underpins everything. Childcare in some parts of Scotland is also a key issue that has arisen through discussions.

- In terms of housing, we talk about affordable housing but that is only part of the story. We need to change the term affordable housing to affordable living. It is about service provision and a broader whole system approach.

Euan mentioned that lack of affordable transport has also been a key area of discussion, and it is even more extreme in rural Scotland. [NPF4](#) also highlights public transport.

- There are issues around SIMD and rural poverty. Isolated areas are in the top 10% of rural access deprivation. There is serious need in terms of things such as services and training being inaccessible. This can be just as damaging and limiting. It is difficult to access funding for rural areas, this needs to be looked at. Many communities have similar issues. Funders only look at top percentages of deprivation and rural poverty is overlooked.

Euan mentioned staffing issues due to a lack of housing which makes business unsustainable.

4) Creativity in regeneration

With introductory presentations from SURF Award winning projects:

Narture CIC, Creative Recovery Inverclyde and Music Broth.

Additional input was provided by SURF Award partner [Creative Scotland](#) and [Culture Counts](#).

About the event

The final workshop in the series highlighted the 2024 SURF Award winning and highly commended projects in the 'Creative Regeneration' category.

The projects featured are all using creativity and artistic approaches to engage with and support members of their local community.

First Presentation Summary: [Narture CIC](#)

Presenter: Saskia Singer, Co-Founder, Narture CIC

Saskia graduated in Fine Art in 2019 from Duncan of Jordanstone. She has a focus on various artistic mediums but they all have strong links to food. She co-founded Narture during the pandemic with her father Robert. He has had various jobs over the years, starting as a weaver and later working in cheffing and hospitality. After experiencing burnout, he turned to yoga and holistic practices before studying Environmental Art at Glasgow School of Art. His work explores creativity's transformative and healing potential. They both have a keen passion on blending food with art.

They co-founded Narture together in June 2020, during lockdown. By combining food sales with community investment, they aim to revitalise Ayr town centre, repurposing vacant properties and fostering cultural vibrancy. They are tackling the decline of Ayr's town centre, where empty shops and a lack of cultural vibrancy have become all too common.

The Ayr venture started pre-pandemic in 2016 as a project called Fresh Ayr, a series of pop up shops in derelict properties featuring gigs, exhibitions, and festivals. They then rebranded to Narture in 2020 to better reflect their mission of nurturing the arts and respecting nature. They launched the experimental bakery/kitchen, which was initially used to host exhibitions like Paper Cave, where local artist, Laura McGlinchey, worked with flour and water weaved together with cancelled gig posters from the pandemic to create a paper cave where they held an event for people to perform. It has since been transformed into a thriving bread shop and café.

They have now expanded into five historic vacant properties, blending food, arts, and wellbeing to help revive Ayr's heritage.

Their spaces are connected a street apart, and painted in the same recognisable teal branding, but they are working to make things more cohesive.

Narture's values are their foundation. These are based on inclusivity, creativity and collaboration. They are committed to sustainability for future generations and empowerment through opportunities that build confidence and inspire change.



Narture champions experiential retail and cultural tourism, breathing new life into Ayr's long-empty historic buildings. The award-winning bread shop and cafe is housed in Lady Cathcart's former home. She helped fund the Highland Clearances, later demanding her money back, calling the people "worthless cabbages." As a subtle nod to her, Rachel Adams' cabbage lights now hang in the café. The team have transformed Ayr's original 1870 library, with carvings of John Knox, William Wallace, and Robert the Bruce, into artist studios, along with workshop, exhibition, and wellbeing spaces. MAKE functions as their artist-in-residence studio, gallery and workshop space, featuring a RISO printer and analogue darkroom. SHAPE, their latest food and arts venue, hosts gigs, events, and projects that explore food as art.

They have recently been awarded funding through the [Scottish Edge](#) competition to expand the bakery into a new building. This was third time lucky with that funding. The project will bring three buildings together to streamline production. This will result in more jobs and improve environmental sustainability. They have grown organically over five years.

The team work with several organisations to expand their impact. Strathclyde University supports their research on sustainable business models, while Glasgow School of Art's "Prioritise Purpose" masters project helps them to understand how to sustain creative enterprises in post-industrial towns. The University of York provides data for their work on neurodiversity and arts regeneration. Narture featured in the [Scottish Artists Union's 2023 report on Artist Run Initiatives](#), they led workshops on alternative incomes and sustainable practices. As members of [Social Enterprise Scotland](#), they have hosted events and support the [South Ayrshire Social Enterprise Network](#), where Saskia sits on the board. They are also partnering with [River Garden](#) on apprenticeships, workshops, and events.

Challenges

Their main challenges stem from personal neurodiverse needs and the difficulty of navigating areas like funding. Narture was born out of a desire to overcome their own struggles with writing bids, and the goal of creating a self-funded organisation combining a love for food and art. However, to grow, they need key funding to support expansion and ensure they can thrive, not just survive.

With rising costs, securing enough funding to run projects is challenging. They are exploring various opportunities to expand the bakery and increase income, but it's been difficult with a small team and limited resources.

The age of the buildings also brings constant, costly issues with maintenance. Despite these challenges, one of their greatest assets is their ability to overcome challenges creatively, navigating barriers with resilience and flexibility.

Recent Projects and Collaborations

The team nurture creativity, develop skills, and connect people through transformative workshops and exhibitions. By engaging with marginalised groups they boost wellbeing, build confidence, and foster social interaction, whilst also creating local jobs and opportunities for skills development.

They have collaborated with the National Galleries of Scotland's artist Ursula Cheng and [Recovery Ayr](#) to run creative workshops, inspired by Alberta Whittle's exhibition in Edinburgh. Focusing on her theme of 'creating dangerously,' they explored the history of [Auchincruive Estate](#), using art as a tool for resistance and compassion. Participants shared personal stories, culminating in a transformative exhibition on Ayr High Street. This project provided a safe, creative space for those in early recovery and dealing with grief, highlighting the healing power of creativity.

A recent project involved collaborating with Glenfairn Care Home to host a debut and retrospective embroidery exhibition on 93-year-old artist Liz Baird, who lived with dementia. A former President of the Embroiderers' Guild, Liz had a prolific career dedicated to teaching others. It was an honour to provide a space to showcase her life's work and creativity.

Another incredible project was collaborating with Colombian artist Jenny Blum to bring her BLUM experience to Ayr, inspired by the Colombian Festival of Light Celebration. Jenny invited participants to step into her blooming universe, dedicating the day to creativity and connection. Over coffee, tea, and biscuits, they shared stories, art, and dreams. Diving into illustrated journals to explore personal creative worlds. The day concluded with the lighting of candles, a tradition from Colombia, symbolising dreams and the power of community through art.

Narture partnered with Recovery Ayr to deliver creative workshops focused on resilience and critical thinking, while also developing bakery apprenticeships for their clients. Their growing team now includes 14 co-workers, alongside 50 volunteers, who actively support Narture's spaces and contribute to community initiatives and career development.

Reflecting on their journey, and with their upcoming 5th birthday festival taking place from 26th–28th September across their spaces in Ayr, it has been a path marked by both vulnerability and strength. They've weathered hard lessons, costly setbacks, and tough challenges, but each experience has helped shape the enterprise into what it is today. Through it all, one thing has remained constant: a deep-rooted commitment to food, art, and the power of shaping futures—together.

[View presentation slides](#)

Second Presentation Summary: [Creative Recovery Inverclyde](#)

Presenter: Martita Dunn, Recovery Development Worker, Your Voice, Inverclyde Community Care Forum

Creative Recovery Inverclyde is an arts initiative embedded within Your Voice's Lived Experience Network, specifically designed for individuals in recovery from alcohol and drug misuse. The project merges the experiences of people in recovery with the expertise of participatory and community artists from across Scotland. Its primary goal is to create a supportive space for creative expression, connection and experimentation, using art as a tool for personal healing and community rebuilding.

Building on strong relationships with local partners, such as [The Wyllieum](#), the [Beacon Arts Centre](#), [RIG Arts](#), [Inverclyde Libraries](#), the [Watt Museum](#), and freelance artists like [Indra Wilson](#) and [Elina Bry](#), Creative Recovery Inverclyde offers a wide range of artistic activities. These include film, sculpture, moving image, sound, writing, theatre, and performance.



Centred on Greenock and Inverclyde, the initiative encourages individuals in recovery to explore their creativity, fostering personal growth and self-expression. The project also aims to strengthen connections within the community, helping participants to rebuild their lives while contributing to the wider regeneration of the region. Through collaborative artistic engagement, Creative Recovery Inverclyde strives to support

recovery journeys, empower individuals, and enhance community cohesion.

Martita gave a case study example of how the project has helped a participant. Kenny found a creative side that had always been in him. Getting involved in the groups got him out of the house and involved in things he had only ever thought about doing. Involvement gave him a purpose and filled a gap left by the end of his employment in catering.

Inspired by stories of artist residences, a participant shared their own desire for time away to focus on creativity and connection. This sparked the idea for establishing their own creative residency programme. It reminded the team of how valuable trips away from familiar surroundings can be for reflection, growth, and building a sense of possibility. Kenny and Dylan, their resident chefs, stepped in to design a menu. Their enthusiasm was infectious and the group's appreciation for their contribution gave a real boost to their confidence and sense of purpose.

They are planning a three-night Creative Recovery Residency at Hospitalfield, an inspiring place with a rich history of supporting artists. The time away offers a valuable chance for participants to step out of their daily routines and immerse themselves in creativity, reflection, and connection.

During the residency they will collaborate with theatre maker Indra Wilson to create a short film exploring stigma and recovery in relation to our surroundings. Through storytelling and performance, they'll reflect on how place and personal experience shape one another. The residency will be a powerful space for growth, creativity, and community.

They are planning two Creative Recovery events at the Wyllieum. The first will take place in September 2025 and will focus on engaging the wider community through a series of creative workshops, offering a chance for others to experience and take part in the work they do.

The second event, in September 2026, will be a celebration of everything they have achieved over the 18 months, bringing together performances, films, publications, and shared experiences. It will be an opportunity to reflect on the journey, showcase the participant's creativity, and highlight the impact of the project.

Long-term Goals

Now that they have secured funding for the next 18 months, they are excited to continue strengthening the partnership between Your Voice Recovery and Recovery Inverclyde. The support allows them to deliver consistent, meaningful creative sessions while also building on everything they have learned over the past three years.

The creation of their first publication with participants has been a major milestone. It captures the depth of their experiences and reflections, and they are proud to use it as a way to share their work more widely. As part of the next phase, they are preparing to travel to Huntly to meet another recovery group. It is an opportunity to exchange knowledge, build connections, and grow a wider network of creative recovery communities across Scotland.

Welcoming a new artist into the project has brought fresh energy and deepened their collective commitment to the group's development. Since the beginning, they have witnessed powerful changes in participant's confidence, creativity, and wellbeing. The residency has created space for people to explore who they are and what they are capable of through creative expression.

With this new chapter, they are ready to expand their reach, continue nurturing this community, and share what they have built with others. They know they are still at the beginning of something important and they are committed to the journey ahead.

[View presentation slides](#)

Third Presentation Summary: [Music Broth](#)

Presenter: James Bajgar, Music Hub Manager, Music Broth

Music Broth is Scotland's loudest library. It is an instrument lending library that also offers repairs and maintenance, both of which are deemed expensive economically but don't take into account environmental costs

They also offer workshops, in their own space in Govanhill primarily, such as the Shift the Power project for people who have music skills but are looking to develop other skills such as marketing etc. They also collaborate on projects with other organisations that focus on health, mental health, and wellbeing related issues.

The library is mainly self-funded and operates on a 50% referral basis from volunteers working in the library, although there are some self-referrals. Music is there to bring people out and used as the tool to get them to engage.

The project offers a high rate of carbon reduction through adopting a circular economy model. Upcycling of instruments means that they are diverted from waste and landfill, whilst repair provides opportunities for skills development, which helps to retain skills that are dying away. They are trying to get repair services back into the city, and gave Austria as an example who utilise vouchers to help reduce the cost of repair.

You don't need to be a member to come into the library, you can just come in and try instruments and equipment.

There is a mindset around what a library is, some people don't want to take instruments away but like to come in. It is about finding people with common interests, this is the same with the volunteers.

They operate some long-term projects, such as those working with New Scots or a project delivered in partnership with LGBTQ Scotland. They have projects running all over Scotland, including in Argyll and Bute.

James showed a short film featuring some of the participants. In the video you can see that some of the people involved are sat on upcycled instruments, showing that instruments can be turned into other things. Music isn't just about playing, there are technical people behind it. You can enjoy music without having to be a musician. The two volunteers in the film were very shy and quiet and now their personalities shine through. They are long-term unemployed and now feel confident that they can go back into employment.

Music Broth offers student placements through education visas. They also work to get people into employment in the creative industries or directly into libraries, using the skills they have gained through being part of Music Broth.

One of their biggest issues is that space is very tight. This is also an issue around getting to other areas and working with other organisations, as they often don't have the space to host. They want to be able to go to other communities and do training etc.

Another challenge they face centres around societal perception. People are getting hassled who can't work but give a few hours volunteering.



Open Discussion

Some of the main comments and areas of discussion are listed below. These varied views and opinions do not necessarily represent the views of SURF or all of the people and organisations present at the workshop.

- *The first delegate asked Creative Recovery where the activity takes place – halls, vacant premises etc.?*

Martita answered that it is within the Your Voice Inverclyde premises, and they have just moved to a bigger space. Space has always been tight so they relied on other organisations in Inverclyde, such as libraries, the Beacon, and the Wyllieum. They wanted to be outdoors as much as possible.

- *The next question was also to Creative Recovery and noted that the recovery community is vulnerable, especially if new in, which makes it difficult to find people. Asked about partnership and how they find people.*

Martita shared that the whole team are in recovery. The project started as a lived-experience project, then she was offered a job. They wanted a recovery hub to be developed. They make it very visible and have been persistent. Local people are involved which helps draw in others, if they see that their friends are involved, it's infectious.

- *Creative Recovery were asked about referrals.*

Martita noted that they are up against other services that offer medication, whilst their solution is social prescribing. Getting some referrals now, and self-referrals. The power of word of mouth.

- *A delegate said that the speakers had mentioned working with creative practitioners and freelancers. What has been put in place to protect these relationships? Keeping people safe.*

James said that it varies as sometimes they are working with other organisations. You need to get people with the right temperament for the specific group, and another partner with expertise. He gave an example of a domestic abuse project and employing two people, one a lived-experience worker and the other a creative. They have separate skills but they cross-over which means individual attention can be given.

Saskia said that Narture always work with partnership organisations who have the right skills and training.

James added that there needs to be two words for social prescribing, as often the outside world thinks the charity is getting something for helping people. They are not part of the NHS, not doing things for free to cut a budget somewhere. Gave an example of school cuts to music departments.

- *The next question focused on gaps in understanding around what each player is doing, and also gaps in pay etc. How do you build understanding?*

James said that they use Musicians Union rates, stating that you have to be strict and stick to your guns. Set the budget from the off. There is a balance between what they provide in comparison to equipment providers.

Saskia added that they use Scottish Artists Union rates and that they have similar issues with schools. It needs to be worthwhile for both parties.

James also said that sometimes people come with a nice idea and want you to do it for free. Try and work together and find funding to cover the costs/fees. Do things properly. Schools often say they have no money but often it is a teacher assumption that the headteacher doesn't have money. Some have unrestricted funds. You need to protect creatives.

Euan mentioned preventative spend

- *Narture were asked how they have been successful in expanding into new properties. Who owns them? Do you have local authority support? An architect?*

Saskia responded that they have mostly done everything themselves. It has been a life-long project. It has taken a long time to build a relationship with the council, which is now bearing fruit. The properties are privately owned. They have received previous funding from [Creative Scotland](#) to set up the RISO printing studio and dark room, and received many donations, including from [Street Level](#) in Glasgow. Everything else comes from bread and the café. They did get Covid Recovery money which helped set up the initial bakery. Robert is on pension credits and volunteers his time and sees this as a form of [Universal Basic Income](#). It's taken tenacity, resilience, and a steadfast belief in the value creativity brings to the area through food and the arts.

- *Narture were asked how they funded the new space.*

Saskia replied that [The Edge](#) provide the funding. They will need other funding but more doors are opening for commercial borrowing. They did work with the council regarding the old toy shop but it was sold from under them.

- *The next question was also to Narture. Opened saying that their place is the only one with decent bread on the high street. They have worked in seaside towns previously in England and social enterprises have done similar to fund arts projects but the council came in with an aggressive regeneration agenda and pushed them out. Is there any research done on these sort of projects to help sustain them better?*

Karen Dick from Creative Scotland answered that some bits of research have been done looking at creative enterprise and the impacts of regeneration when people who kickstart it are moved on*. Mentioned the [Midsteeples Quarter](#) model as an example, where they have brought in other bigger chains etc. but haven't moved out the original artists.

* Links to some research:

- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13563475.2023.2205032>
- <https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/301463/1/301463.pdf>
- <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/fileadmin/uploads/dc/Documents/artists-and-places.pdf>
- <https://www.culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Arts-and-Regeneration-1.pdf>

- *Another question to Narture asked about lessons learned from their Glasgow project 'One Cube or Two' and how it links to their current work. Also, has moving from Glasgow to Ayr reshaped their mission?*

Saskia noted that working with the council can sometimes be challenging—they've even been asked "What's the point of the arts?". So they have to advocate locally. They need to get better and find the time to find more data in reports. They have advisors who help with that - everyone

loves numbers! Locally they advocate but nationally and internationally they don't have to – juxtaposition.

- *The next question was to all three projects and focussed on partnership work with non-arts organisations. Do you have to advocate for the role of creativity or do people come to you?*

Saskia said that with the council it is difficult. They have been asked what is the point of the arts. So they have to advocate locally. They need to get better and find the time to find more data in reports. They have advisors who help with that - everyone loves numbers! Locally they advocate but nationally and internationally they don't have to – juxtaposition.

James said that he had been thinking about this a lot lately. He gave an example of working with a care home. Biomedical research would have proved 20 years ago the benefits of putting a music room in a care home. He sits in groups and forums but everyone already knows this there. If something appears then good but not going out looking for it anymore, not his thing to fight for. People are facing burnout. Doing things for others but a lack of self-care. You need to put your own oxygen mask on first.

Policy Discussion

A wider policy discussion was held and included input from Karen Dick, Head of Place, Partnerships & Communities at [Creative Scotland](#), and Kathryn Welch, Co-Director at [Culture Counts](#).

Euan mentioned Robert using his state pension as [Universal Basic Income](#) and how this allows Narture to flourish. There are wider things to think about around that.

Euan asked about gentrification and being priced out?

Karen gave an example of Leith and making it pretty to get tenants in at a higher cost. Artists have been working with no heat etc. but then landlords look for higher costs. There are areas in Scotland where people have been priced out but also areas that are the opposite, such as the Midsteeple, where there is a commitment from creatives to keep it that way. [Leith Late](#) are now back in Leith to try and balance out gentrification. Whose decision is it to stop these things from happening? What is creative regeneration and who is it for?

Kathryn gave the example of a project she is doing in her home town in Derbyshire. [Junction Arts](#) are the original arts organisation dating back to when the mines closed, 50 years ago. What is it like to be part of that and seeing the change that has taken place? Art as part of the system or as a disruptor? Prop up the system or want something else? What is the role for artists and arts organisations, and how do they play nicely within the system? Have to be part of the system sometimes but the real thing is to be outside and agitate. How do we provide support that allows for risk?

Karen told a story about a Board Member at [The Stove](#) who got involved in saving the building to stop it being a call centre. The council were understanding and supportive. The Board Member then wanted to step down and be an artist again but didn't know how to frame it. Involved in discussions to make change which then changes their role.

Euan mentioned a £1bn gap in local authority funding over the next two years. Extreme pressures on budgets, with national insurance increases, cost of living etc. Biggest areas of cuts are to children's services and administration. Things will get worse in the public sector. Due to cuts people suffer and mitigate for cuts elsewhere. Can we say no or do we just need to keep going? There are ongoing

redundancy discussions in the third sector due to funding decisions and the time taken to tell projects.

Karen said that the Scottish Government likes to give out restricted funding. Creative Scotland has increased funding but they can't increase their head count to deliver that. They are being asked to deliver more but with no more resource. Can't say no to giving money to artists so they have to make it happen. The sector just makes it happen which leads to burnout. When do you say no or that's not our job? How do we want a country to run and what do we value – that funding can then be used for? Party political decisions change all the time – short-term responses when it should be about long-term thinking.

Kathryn mentioned an interview with the Director of Shelter about the housing crisis where she said in the current climate can we justify funding libraries. It is important that we can answer that question. We have to be able to say that the arts did deserve the uplift in funding due to previous underfunding in the sector. It is a useful question to force ourselves to answer. There has been a language shift – cliff edge, crisis point, and perfect storm were being used but then when there is an uplift in funding and other sectors didn't get one the language changes. We need to shift the message. Tell a story that isn't just that we are really poor as a sector. Think about the funding ecosystem and get away from the highly political environment. We need to have conversations together and find routes to corporate funding and philanthropy.

Euan mentioned who funds sports – no whisper of don't fund when carbon intensive etc.

An attendee added that they are concerned that we could keep perpetuating not enough money and have to compete with housing etc. only reason Creative Scotland got more money is because people fought back. The person from Shelter should be challenged and rich people should be taxed. Reject the argument that we need to justify ourselves.

There was a comment from the room on how other countries would not do this or draw a comparison between a housing crisis and libraries, the British dichotomy. We need to be at the forefront to argue for money.

Euan mentioned the [review of Creative Scotland](#).

An attendee asked why should we be saying we need to have art? We need to stand up and fight. Mentioned world issues.

Euan mentioned unionisation of other sectors but it is difficult to do that in the third sector as organisations are working with vulnerable groups and they see the outcomes so feel you can't say no.

Karen mentioned that she is the union representative for Creative Scotland and staff could strike over pay and conditions. Gallery staff etc. are lower paid in comparison to other workers.

Euan asked how you can use existing infrastructure within Glasgow so that you can't close a library, milk the space. There has to be an outcry before something is done.

Karen referred to a report on the [Civic Role of Arts Organisations](#). There has been a loss of civic space within communities, now offering free warm hubs. Arts organisations are filling the role of civic space similar to arts workers filling the role of a social workers. This is not a new discussion but thought we had made the point on the role of the arts in health and connection.

SURF Manifesto

Euan asked for feedback on and asks to be included in the 2026 SURF Manifesto.

Euan mentioned that funding is coming up in the other discussions.

- Sometimes some of the things they do like upcycling etc. shifts costs from the local authority if they had gone to waste. Shifting costs of social prescribing and cost savings. We need to push that agenda. There is a division between arts and sciences – engineering etc.
- It is really important for prevention. Need to think outside the box. Not just an easy fix.
- There are secondary school teacher attitude issues around the curriculum. They just see allocated time and say these are extra-curricular activities to do outside of classes. They don't engage properly. Issue around large institutions being remote and distant.
- It is comfortable today as we are in an arts space. The term wellbeing is not articulated in a political forum. Arts for social cohesion needs to be embedded. Geographical politics of Scotland – e.g. bus services, roads etc. Costs in a large urban area vs rural area – not fair distribution of arts across Scotland.

Euan mentioned the housing crisis coming through in all discussions, regardless of theme. Transport being a secondary issue.

- Schools are expected to have youth work but that is not the young person's space. How do you reach those that don't attend school etc.? There is a massive disconnect. Shouldn't be held up by the third sector. You can't say certain things in schools and we can't silence young people. Need to decide if they want the arts to prop them up or not.

End of paper

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