

The Women's Fund for Scotland



Headlines

- The Women's Fund for Scotland can demonstrate a direct response to significant underinvestment in projects relating to women and girls.
- 2024 will see the delivery of a multi-year awards programme which could provide grantees with long term security and the opportunity to deliver legacy type projects.
- Two grantees have submitted their final reports, and this report will showcase the success stories that have emerged from project activities.

Overview

This report aims to provide an update on several projects that have benefited from grants awarded by The Women's Fund for Scotland. The report will also explore how the Fund is championing specialist funding for women and girls.

Foundation Scotland hopes that this report will highlight the exceptional difference that monies are having in empowering women across Scotland.

Specialist Funding for Women and Girls

With every grantmaking report, The Women's Fund for Scotland endeavors to examine its grantmaking practices, individual testimonials and its contributions towards wider policies and goals that aim to tackle gender inequality. In this report, we will be looking at the Fund's place within the third sector and the way it offers specialist funding for women and girls.

In Scotland you are never more than 50 miles away from a project supported by the Women's Fund for Scotland and since its inception, the Women's Fund has distributed almost £3 million in grants to over 640 community groups and local charities. Yet, when one scopes out, underinvestment in women and girls remains a persistent problem across the UK's third sector.

In 2021, the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research published research that found severe underinvestment in specialist nonprofits serving disadvantaged women and girls. **Of £4.1 billion granted to charities by funders, groups assisting vulnerable women claimed just 1.8%, revealing a troubling lack of priority for the under supported sector.**

Experts state that resourcing women-led groups generates powerful positive change for marginalized communities facing systemic inequality and mistreatment. Enabling their advocacy secures government understanding of and responsiveness towards target populations' unmet needs. Sustained funding facilitates continuation of their critical support services. However, analysis shows **86.5% of women's nonprofits are small operations, yet these received only 3.9% of all income.** Over a third of already scarce funding explicitly targeting women and girls supported larger generic charities lacking specialized women's assistance. Micro-grants under £10,000 comprised most donations to dedicated women's groups, indicating extensive obstacles to financing their work.

Research also highlights that low-income **mothers act as "shock absorbers" against poverty**, carrying responsibility for purchasing, preparing food, and budget management to shield families. Recent evidence found financially strained women adopting increasingly detrimental coping habits as costs rose, including energy and food reductions, amassed debts, overwork, and social withdrawal.



For almost a decade, The Women's Fund for Scotland has tackled the idea of specialist funding in innovative ways. First and foremost, the creation of 6 investment themes aim to take a far-reaching approach to supporting a variety of projects and circumstances impacting women and girls. Let's take a look at some examples below:

Developing Leadership and Innovation

[Scottish Women in Sport](#) requested grant funding to launch a pilot mentorship scheme for 12-15 young women, aimed at developing leadership skills and knowledge in the sports sector. Experienced women leaders guided participants through interactive modules focused on building identity, managing stress, and increasing resilience. Taking place in Glasgow from April to July 2022 but open to women across Scotland, project activities hoped to inspire and empower participants to address leadership disparities highlighted in research from the Observatory for Scottish Sport. By supporting young women in this way, Scottish Women in Sport sought to foster the next generation of female sporting talent in the country.

Growing Social Connections

[Amma Birth Companions](#) launched a 12-month therapeutic gardening pilot in April 2022 for its client group led by staff & volunteers. Participants accessed weekly drop-in gardening plus monthly workshops

by external leaders on pre/post-natal wellbeing. ABC also organised nature trips to gardens around Glasgow and Edinburgh to demonstrate gardening's benefits.

Moving on from Abuse

[Rise Against Abuse](#) applied for funding for their 'Justice Equality for Women and Children Project', which supported women and children recovering from domestic abuse and gender-based violence by navigating the legal system, producing key legal documents, mediating communications with key players, preparing statements and reports, assisting with legal aid, and explaining opaque legal processes so victims could effectively communicate their situations.

Improving health and wellbeing

[Glendale Women's Café](#) delivered a 10-week programme to combat isolation among Pollokshields women. Activities included biweekly crafting focused on reusing materials, professional wellbeing and massage sessions, heritage site visits, a menopause information session, and casual café chats. The welcoming space and engagement opportunities aimed to support the target group's mental, physical, and social health.

Building skills and confidence

[Just Bee Productions](#) sought to expand its women-only services through additional staff capacity. With only two current female support workers limiting women's service hours, hiring a third enabled increasing one-on-one crisis support and advocacy sessions from 12 to 20 per week. Expanded offerings also aimed to better meet demand for recreational programs like mother and baby groups, fitness classes, jewelry-making, and yoga.

Combatting poverty and building financial resilience

[Broke not Broken](#) requested funds for user-led activities to connect local disadvantaged women, given barriers facing existing groups in their rural area. They aimed to facilitate 30 women in Perth and Kinross to jointly plan accessible outings and workshops focused on relationship-building, skill-sharing, and confidence-building through peer support. Transport and cost issues were addressed so participants could fully benefit.

What's more, WFS is further revolutionizing third sector support through offering multi-year funding awards as well as traditional 1-year grants. 2024, will see several women's groups deliver three-year projects that will aim to provide a long-term impact for women and girls across a number of local authorities. It is hoped that the recipient organisations will gain significant security to grow projects and

services sustainably over time and the Women's Fund for Scotland looks forward to tracking their progress over the next few years.

It's clear that the third sector must still make major progress in equalizing funding access and opportunities for women's and girls' organisations. However, innovative models like the Women's Fund for Scotland provide reason for optimism by pioneering trust-based and collaborative philanthropy principles designed specifically to empower these groups. As the findings show, the current landscape still enables systemic funding gaps, disproportionate barriers for smaller specialized charities, and insecure income streams that threaten sustainability. By revolutionizing sector norms through flexible, multi-year support paired with meaningful community collaboration, WFS points the way towards a future where vital assistance for marginalized women can thrive through responsive and understanding partnerships.

References : [Mapping the UK Women and Girls Sector and its Funding - Rosa \(rosauk.org\)](#)

Impact Story: Al Masaar

Grant Awarded: £4,505.00

Location: Falkirk

Al Masaar was established in 2014 and gained SCIO status in 2020. It supports members of minority communities in the Falkirk area, providing practical and social support, especially to people who are more isolated and vulnerable. The organisation aims to promote equality and inclusion and a community where everyone is enabled and empowered to achieve their full potential. It has five members of staff who all work from home and hold a weekly face-to-face team meeting at an office in Falkirk. It also has access to a hot desk at Denny Community flat. The organisation operates Monday to Friday from 9 am to 5 pm and delivers some weekend activities. Currently, it runs a parent's group, youth club, forest school, and delivers workshops and training courses on topics such as autism, mental health, and well-being. Al Masaar works in partnership with a range of organisations, including Falkirk CVS, Stirling TSI, Falkirk Council Community Learning & Development (CLD), Falkirk Football Club Foundation, BEMIS (National umbrella organization supporting the development of ethnic minorities voluntary sector in Scotland).

In 2022, the organisation was supported with a grant from the Women's Fund for Scotland to deliver a project that would engage with Black and Brown Women of Colour in Falkirk who have suffered from the impact of the pandemic. These participants would be from different ethnic minority backgrounds who find it difficult to engage with the local community because of language barriers. Al Massar's focus was on women suffering from trauma, isolation, anxiety, depression, and lack of confidence, including refugees.

**Al Masaar
Womens' Sewing**

8 Sessions
Every Thursday
9.30am to 11.30 am

FALKIRK SEWING STUDIO
Jan 26th,
Feb 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd,
March 2nd, 9th, 16th

FOR A REGISTRATION
FORM CONTACT:-
ADMIN@ALMASAAR.ORG
07821356406

For Minority Ethnic Single Mothers

Al Masaar Parent Club
Women's Fund Scotland Helping Women
Falkirk Sewing Studio

To kick the project off, Al Masaar arranged nine weekly sewing sessions for women where they designed and stitched their own coats. There was much interest when the charity advertised and a group of women going through difficult times were selected to take part. The small group allowed the women to relax, feel comfortable and open up. One lady mentioned she never goes out because she gets anxious seeing many people after her divorce. She enjoyed attending and appreciated the small group size. Al Masaar had one staff member responsible for delivering the project who spoke some languages. Firstly, she booked the studio and Utandwa, the sewing tutor, to teach the ladies. She then made an online form to register participants. She contacted single-parent members and struggling members to sign them up. Unfortunately, getting traumatised ladies to participate was not easy. Some feedback was that they didn't want people knowing their situations, were scared of judgement from participating, and the dates and times didn't work for all.

Nonetheless, six participants signed up and participated in the weekly sessions. Another three, female young carers signed up for another session. The staff member informed the ladies of the sessions the night before by text, booked taxis if needed, the creche and a healthy breakfast. Utanda taught the ladies how to accurately measure arms, shoulders, waist, etc. She told them which patterns to use and buy when planning to sew coats, dresses, trousers, etc.

The sewing sessions achieved several positive outcomes for the participants. Attending helped alleviate isolation as the nine ladies formed new friendships and became Al Masaar members. Over half were new to Al Masaar and joined other community groups. By learning new skills and completing unique coats, the women said their confidence grew in their ability to complete things. For most, it was their first time using commercial machines. While sewing, the women shared trauma stories and tips to feel better and manage children while suffering. There was empathy between the single mums, including a widow, who

discussed solo parenting. Some were domestic abuse survivors and appreciated having a safe space to share and feel heard. Childcare arrangements helped mums fully participate and relax.

The ladies can now access community information and attend other Al Masaar women and children programmes. They enjoyed learning sewing, with conversations about their mothers' and grandmothers' sewing knowledge. At first some struggled, but slowly understood and looked forward to attending weekly. In the end, they created unique coats and felt proud to show their children. Participants included single trauma and abuse survivors, a new African widow with two young children, a woman with a seriously ill husband, and isolated new immigrants. Two spoke fluent English while the rest had little, but translation help facilitated participation.

9 women directly benefited from project activities



4 women reported feeling better prepared for further education.



All participants reported that their inter-personal skills have improved (e.g. my social, communication and relationship skills)



Case Study

Tasneem*, a woman in her early thirties moved to Falkirk alone with her two young children after her husband passed away six months after arriving in the UK three years ago. As a single parent responsible for a five- and four-year-old, she struggled greatly with her limited English, lack of benefits, having to walk far distances to shop and access services, and overall isolation.

She saw a social media post advertising the sewing sessions with creche and viewed it as an opportunity to meet other women. At first quiet, she eventually opened up about her husband's passing and subsequent struggles. The sewing tutor knew someone who was able to help get her visa issues resolved.

"After my husband passed away, this is the first time I have been able to take part in an activity and not have to worry about my children."

Through participating, she made new friends and exchanged contact information. She joined the Al Masaar members' group, so her children were able to enrol in the organisation's free summer activities. She expressed immense gratitude for the program giving her a chance to bond with those facing similar situations and form not only women friendships but children's as well. Overall, discovering this group proved deeply valuable in reducing her isolation and establishing a support system. *Please note, names have been changed for anonymity.

Al Masaar would like to extend the following message to the Women's Fund for Scotland – ***"This charity is run by women, the majority who are single parents going through some difficult times now and again. So, your patience and support has been much appreciated."***

Impact Story: SHE Scotland

Grant Awarded: £9,840.00

Location: Edinburgh

SHE Scotland is a Community Interest Company based in Edinburgh that was established in 2017. It aims to support the mental and physical wellbeing of women through various activities and services. With a full-time staff of one and four part-timers as well as 15 volunteers, SHE Scotland serves around 220 girls per week or 10,560 per year.



Research shows young women report lower levels of life satisfaction and wellbeing compared to young men, with higher rates of mental health issues that often arise in early adolescence. SHE Scotland's work targets this demographic. For the past two years, the organisation has focused on delivering after school programming for primary and secondary school girls in deprived areas of North and West Edinburgh. These sessions have been mainly funded by the schools. SHE Scotland received funding from WFS in 2023 to support a new project to expand their arts-based offerings to existing youth groups and clubs across Edinburgh. Building on past relationships, they aimed to provide an additional 6 hours of arts activities (music, drama, writing, photography) per week across two 10-week blocks in 2020. Each session would have the capacity to serve 12-15 girls and women. In total, SHE Scotland expected 200 individuals to participate in the funded programming.

Over the course of one year, SHE Scotland delivered the SHE Voices project which aimed to enhance the organisation's existing MIND, BODY & SOUL programmes across four Edinburgh high schools, reaching

126 young women initially. An additional community-based programme then engaged 32 of the school participants in further workshops and activities hosted at SHE Scotland's office.

In partnership with theatre company Stellar Quines, the young women explored personal experiences and issues through various creative methods including recordings, drama exercises, and graffiti art. The overarching focus examined the impact of social media on self-esteem and self-worth. Ultimately two films were produced by the participants to showcase their experiences, one of which was screened by Stellar Quines and the other at an event with the participants' friends and family. The group felt compelled to raise awareness about the effects of social media. To support their campaign, they interviewed women about their own experiences with social media. This led to an impactful connection with Dr Kat Rezalia from Napier University who was interested in formally developing this project into a research study. Napier University collected additional data from girls outside of Edinburgh to gain wider insights. The learnings directly informed a new workshop series launching in August 2023, created in conjunction with SHE Scotland.

While 32 young women initially joined the community programming, over time other commitments and transportation challenges caused the number to reduce to 18 by project completion. Initially, the level of support some participants required was not fully detected. During the project it became evident that 8 participants faced substantial personal issues including family problems, low self-worth, and self-harming behaviour which necessitated extra mentoring and care from SHE Scotland. Documented learnings focused on increasing self-esteem, confidence, peer relationships, and overall wellbeing. However, the young women also gained valuable skills in filmmaking, research methods, and campaigning. Bringing together girls from different areas of Edinburgh introduced a constructive new dynamic as well. The staff and ambassadors at SHE Scotland also expanded their own understanding of the issues facing young women today through hands-on experience in documentary filmmaking, data documentation, and event management. The legacy and impact of HE Voices surpassed initial aims. The promising partnership with Napier University in particular enables the research and learnings to influence programmes and policy for generations of young women to come. Overall, the project opened up crucial conversations, forged empowering connections between the participants, and equipped these young women with creative outlets and tools for amplifying their voices to drive awareness and change around issues impacting girls today.

Case Study

During the early stages of the SHE Voices project, SHE Scotland engaged with Leanne, a single mother of two young children. Leanne actively participated in initial workshops examining issues affecting young women. She then joined the community-based program, where she received additional mentoring

support that empowered her to enrol in an Adult Returners course at Edinburgh College. This led Leanne to gain qualifications in mentoring and access a Social Science program run by the University of Edinburgh.

Throughout this journey, Leanne grew markedly in self-confidence. She became a mentor with SHE Scotland, guiding primary school girls through real-life challenges impacting their education and development. Having continued her affiliation with SHE, Leanne has now earned a place to study Law at the University of Edinburgh. She vocalizes the profound influence the SHE Voices experience had on setting her on this positive new path. In her words:

"I am so grateful that I took up a place on SHE Voices, not only did I personally learn about the issues which affect women but also I gained so much knowledge, experience and received so much additional support from the SHE team, they believed in me even when I had doubts, they provided a shoulder to cry on, a kick up the backside sometimes and a whole lot of love."

32 women gained
additional training through
personalised workshops



158 women participated
in the project



Participants stated that
they felt better equipped
to enter the labour market
thanks to project activities

