

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 saw the delivery of a multi-year awards programme which provided grantees with long term security and the opportunity to deliver legacy type projects. In total, 8 organisations benefitted from these monies.
- February 2024 saw 25, one-year awards distributed to organisations working with women in Scotland. This was one of the most competitive grantmaking rounds in the Fund's history.

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 supporting the lives of women living and working in rural Scotland.

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

Support for Women in Rural Scotland

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 how the Fund is empowering the lives of women and girls living in rural Scotland.

Rural women in Scotland face unique economic challenges, according to a Scottish Government working paper on the rural economy. The paper reveals that "***Women living in Remote Rural Scotland have the lowest annual income of any group, and the largest median Gender Pay gap being at £5,076***" (***Scottish Government, Rural Economy Working Paper***). This pay disparity highlights the importance of understanding and addressing the factors that contribute to gender inequality in rural areas. Remote locations, limited employment opportunities and cuts to healthcare can all play a role in creating disadvantages for women in rural communities.



From a health and wellbeing perspective, women living in the Highlands of Scotland face significant healthcare challenges due to the region's remote and vast geography. Access to essential services, such as maternal care and reproductive health, is limited by the long distances required to travel to healthcare facilities. As highlighted in an article by [Holyrood](#), ***women from areas like Caithness and Moray***

often have to travel over 100 miles to Inverness or Aberdeen for appointments and procedures, incurring substantial costs for travel, accommodation, and time off work. This lack of localised care can lead to delays in diagnosis, worsening of conditions, and avoidance of seeking treatment altogether.

For more than 10 years, the Women's Fund for Scotland has worked to help and improve the lives of women living in rural areas. Their activities are often designed around or directly deal with the issues that women face living in remote places. This report looks at some examples of their work.

Women's Fund on the Western Isles

In 2024, [Volunteering Hebrides](#) was awarded a multi-year award to deliver its SHEmendous! Project. The project will focus on building self-esteem, independence, resilience, confidence, and overall wellbeing in women and girls who reside across the Western Isles. The project will aim to deliver the following activities:

- Get S.E.T. workshop series which will support girls aged 13–18-year-olds over a block of 6 weeks. This will be delivered three times over the course of the project. The workshops will take place at the organisation's premises and activities will focus wellbeing, mindfulness and improving self-esteem. This programme will meet the health and wellbeing outcomes in Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence and will be ASDAN accredited.
- Queen Bees - This pillar will be specially created for women aged 18+ and will provide opportunities to learn new craft skills, engage in hobbies and build positive healthy relationships in a safe and relaxing environment.
- Bike Around – This pillar will support outdoor activities: cycling, woodland adventures and gardening, promoting the health benefits of being outdoors and improving physical/mental wellbeing. Activities will be delivered in all seasons and across a variety of locations on Harris and Lewis.

Project activities will commence in May 2024 and end in May 2027, and it is anticipated that 150 women and girls will directly benefit from project activities over the course of three years (50 per year). This project is a brilliant example of how the Fund is supporting women in rural Scotland to come together, build social connections and acquire new skills.

Cycling comes to the Cairngorms

On mainland Scotland, WFS have also encouraged new social opportunities for women residing in smaller outposts. In 2024, [Cairngorm Confidence CIC](#) received an award to deliver the "Trail Therapy Badenoch and Strathspey" project between April 2024 and the end of March 2025. Trail therapy is a therapeutic intervention using mountain bike (MTB) group rides led by specifically trained leaders to reduce social isolation and loneliness focusing on suicide prevention and promoting positive mental health and wellbeing. The trail therapy will be delivered by a trained Scottish Mental Health First Aid practitioner (SMHFA) and Trail Therapy leader with the support of two MTB female leaders. It will deliver four, 5 week half day session blocks, for eight referred or self-referred women with a mental ill health diagnosis. It is anticipated that the project will benefit 35 women.

Tackling health inequalities in Oban

On the west coast, WFS have supported [Argyll Wellbeing Hub's](#) peer support project. The centre is an important hub that serves many residents residing in rural outposts and islands around Oban. The women's peer support group has run weekly since January 2019 and is very well established in the community. It is filling a gap in provision for local women's peer support which did not exist before AWH started the project. It currently has 20 regular members who attend almost every week. New members join regularly, with three new members having joined the group over the past three months. Based on the feedback from members and from referral agencies, the women's group has made a positive impact on women's lives locally.



Impact Story: Southside Boxing Academy

Grant Awarded: £4,200.00

Location: Glasgow

Southside Boxing Academy and Community Hub is a Community Interest Company that is located in Toryglen, Glasgow. The Academy was constituted in 2015 and the primary aim of the organisation is to deliver boxing lessons and training for ages 6-16 and over 16s. Initially, they were only a boxing gym, however, the organisation relocated to Toryglen in 2021 and started to see and experience some of the social problems which are prevalent in the more deprived areas in Glasgow. As a result, they have adapted the organisation and activities to suit the needs of the local community. They run a variety of school fitness sessions, family days, boxing classes, fitness classes, and community development initiatives. Operationally, the organisation is assisted by 1 full time and 2 part time staff members as well as a pool of 8 volunteers. The Academy estimates that it works with approximately 350 individuals a week.

In 2023, the organisation was supported with a grant from the Women's Fund for Scotland to facilitate a women's only exercise project. The project would take place over a 14-week period, and the applicant aimed to deliver 14 x 90-minute sessions for women in the local community. The project was open exclusively for women and girls aged 13 and above. The applicant estimated that 50 women and girls directly benefited from the project activities.



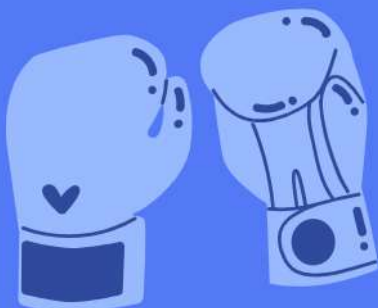
The "Women's Wellbeing" project at Southside Boxing Academy & Community Hub demonstrated a high level of engagement and positive feedback from participants over the 14-week program. It offered a comprehensive lineup of boxing, self-defence, and yoga classes designed to empower 50 women in the Toryglen area. The boxing and self-defence classes were particularly popular, providing valuable skills while fostering strength and confidence. Yoga classes aimed to offer a holistic approach but did not resonate as strongly with participants as anticipated. Despite this, attendance was consistently high throughout the program. The varying levels of enjoyment for the yoga component provided valuable insights into tailoring future programs more closely to participants' interests. It emphasized the importance of ongoing feedback and adaptability in program design to ensure all elements are equally engaging and beneficial for the target audience. Overall, the project was a success in promoting women's wellbeing through physical activity and community building.

One of the most effective strategies employed by the organisers was the power of community-based recruitment. By engaging directly with the local community in Toryglen through community events and local partnerships, they significantly increased their reach and participant engagement. This grassroots approach fostered a sense of ownership and investment among the participants, which proved pivotal in maintaining high attendance rates.

The organisers faced the challenge of fluctuating attendance during periods of exceptionally sunny weather. To address this, they adapted their schedule to include more flexible timings and outdoor sessions where possible, turning the challenge into an opportunity to enjoy the outdoors while aligning with their climate-conscious approach.

Impact Data

50 participants
successfully took part in
the project



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



The club gained 44 new
members over the course
of the project



Impact Story: Alchemy Film and Arts

Grant Awarded: £3,000.00

Location: Scottish Borders

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.

Alchemy Film & Arts was established in 2010 and has been a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) since 2017. The organisation is based in the Scottish Borders town of Hawick and it works with communities both locally and internationally, using film as a way to come together, have conversations and make positive change. Across a year-round programme of developmental activities, screenings, discussions, workshops, residencies, and community filmmaking Alchemy Film and Arts creates spaces in which collective expression, creative learning and critical thinking can take place. The organisation works closely developing long term and lasting partnerships with local groups and individuals. It works with service users of Border Women's Aid, Borders Additional Needs Group, Scottish Borders After a Suicide Working Group, Hawick Primary Schools, Burnfoot Community Hub, Hawick Film and Video Group (over 70s), and other local communities who face social and/or economic barriers. The organisation highlights that all of its projects are tailored to the stakeholders involved and carried out with robust safeguarding policies, progress trackers, and outcomes to celebrate together.

In 2022, the organisation was awarded a grant to deliver its "Film Town Team" project. This project aimed to see Alchemy Film and Arts develop a resourced media team made up of vulnerable local women. It sought to create a supported network and mentored course for young women to learn autonomous and collaborative digital and creative skills. This would allow them to platform their own voices, stories, conditions, and ambitions, as well as upskill to enhance employment opportunities. Over the period of March 2023 to October 2023, the project aimed to deliver a bespoke fortnightly course and it was hoped that 20 young women living in the Scottish Borders would stand to directly benefit from project activities.

The "Film Town Team" project successfully engaged local women in creative film activities. Working directly with participants, Alchemy facilitated monthly film clubs, produced a bespoke participant-centred film archive and writing workshops, culminating in a film play. Throughout these activities, the project engaged with over 600 people, including 550 audience members and 50 active female participants.

Partnerships with local museums and archives provided participants insights into Hawick's unseen film archives, inspiring them to express contemporary ideas through these historical images.

The focus on film writing allowed for a depth of skill development, with a writing course attended by 30 women guided by mentors like director Rachael Disbury and playwright Jules Horne. Three women acted in the final film-play, directed by Fiona Mackinnon, exploring themes of memory and self-expression by animating ghosts from Hawick's past. An Augmented Reality exhibition further engaged the public, tested and workshopped with the young female participants of the Film Town Team. This multifaceted approach provided multiple access points for women to actively participate, learn skills across filmmaking disciplines, and celebrate their expressive work's culmination. The engaged team of women now turns its attention to developing a moving image installation for exhibition in Spring 2025.

Impact Data

1 new partnership was formed over the course of the project



49 participants felt a boost in confidence



4 women reported feeling better prepared for further education.



Testimonial

' The opportunity to work on a project with multi-media and theatrical outputs allowed me to really develop skills in areas I have varying degrees of familiarity with, in a truly supported environment. To have a properly new experience was unique and meaningful. Being a part of Alchemy's projects makes me feel like I'm making impacts I can be proud of.'



Impact Story: Lochview Rural Training

Grant Awarded: £2,856.00

Location: Highland

Established as a SCIO in 2021, Lochview Rural Training (LRT) aims to promote and deliver rural learning, training, and career opportunities. Based at the founder's croft near Lairg, with access to land and a classroom, LRT offers various programs. These include a summer croft club, young crofters clubs, adult education classes, craft clubs using natural products, school learning opportunities, and open days. As of March 2022, LRT had supported 72 children/youths and 35 adults through its staff team of the founder/manager, two part-time tutors, and a freelance development consultant.

In 2023, the organisation was awarded a grant of £2,856.00 to deliver a programme of subsidized learning workshops for women in rural crafts and skills. 23 workshops would be held, covering topics including felting, fencing, drystone dyking, corn dollies (straw crafts), willow weaving, animal care, woodworking and an introduction to crofting. Each workshop aimed to have 4-8 places, depending on the level of tutor supervision required and it was anticipated that 100 women residing in the rural highlands would stand to benefit.

Thanks to the Women's Fund for Scotland, a wide range of workshops and classes were offered for women living in rural communities over a 12-month period. A total of 23 sessions were run, ranging from wet felting, needle felting, peg loom weaving, corn/straw work, drystone walling, lambing, introduction to sheep, willow weaving, basket making, and spinning wool to make products. Each workshop was fully booked, with class sizes ranging from 6 to 15 women per session depending on the activity.

The women who participated were aged between 16 and 73 years old. Skilled local tutors from within Sutherland were identified, which helped with the planning and organizing process going smoothly as intended. The courses offered were carefully selected based on anticipated popularity, as similar workshops had not been run in the area before. This strategy proved successful, with spaces filling up very quickly.

Unexpectedly, the courses became oversubscribed, necessitating the addition of extra sessions. The women instantly booked back into the next workshops, which although not anticipated initially, was seen as a very positive outcome. The high demand and enthusiasm from participants demonstrated the project's success in providing valuable learning opportunities for women in these rural communities.



The project's future looks promising, with plans to continue offering workshops that cater to the rural community's needs and interests. Having generated a substantial social media following and positive word-of-mouth, the organizers now have a waiting list for the next round of workshops. Although funding has not been secured yet, they aim to implement a tiered costing approach to make the workshops accessible to all income levels. The tutors who supported the initial program have also expressed keen interest in providing more sessions. With this community demand and tutor commitment, the organisation hopes to maintain the current level of engaging and empowering workshops for women.

Case Study

A skilled French basket weaver, newly arrived in the community, was initially hesitant about teaching group workshops due to her lack of experience and being new to the area. However, after some encouragement, she agreed to become a tutor. Her first workshop helped overcome her nerves, and her confidence grew as she went on to lead five different willow-based workshops. Inspired by this positive experience, she is now undergoing further willow weaving training to support advanced courses. This opportunity has not only allowed her to create a small micro-enterprise for herself but

has also facilitated her integration into the local community, where she has made numerous new friends. Her journey exemplifies how teaching opportunities can foster personal growth, skills development, and community connections.

Impact Data

7 women reported that they feel an increased sense of belonging in their community



145 hours of activities were delivered



2 women reported that they felt less lonely



Impact Story: Dundee International Women's Centre

Grant Awarded: £5,000.00

Location: Dundee

Dundee International Women's Centre (DIWC), established 1969, is a female-only community space in the city of Dundee which helps women of all ethnicities and nationalities gain qualifications and socialise. Service provision is varied and there is a particular focus on supporting language classes in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Five levels of classes are offered, plus a preparation class for women studying towards the Life in the UK test. DIWC is also an SQA Centre, accredited to teaching Playwork/Childcare, Employability and Working with Others. These courses encourage social inclusion and provide practical, tangible support for health & wellbeing, literacy and language skills, gaining employment and awareness of domestic abuse. In 2019, the organisation won the Women's Support Organisation of the year by the Scottish Women's Awards.

In 2023, WFS supported the group with core funding which would enable DIWC to run its core programmes over the next 12 months. Core service provision would include the following activities:

- ESOL classes
- Skills based subjects – Digital, French conversation, Sewing, Arts & Crafts
- Social, Health & Wellbeing groups
- Weekly Job Search sessions
- SQA-accredited Qualifications

Women of all ethnicities would benefit from the above projects, many with reduced levels of literacy and English language skills. DIWC stated that 100 women will directly benefit from project activities. This project aimed to align with several investment themes of the Women's Fund for Scotland including growing social connections, building skills and confidence and improving health and wellbeing.

During spring 2023, a learner-led drop-in session was conducted for women from diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. The sessions allowed participants to choose their learning topics, ranging from using the internet for job searches to assistance with personal devices. One participant from a care home had her laptop set up, another created an email address to shop online, and some used the

provided equipment due to the lack of a PC at home. Another woman utilized an audio app to improve her English. Overall, seven women from Kenya, Bangladesh, India, and Scotland attended.

Following these sessions, there was a staffing change and a shift in the approach to learning, which positively impacted attendance. This helped better understand future goals. As a result, 16 women attended regularly.

In autumn, the new group began by discussing the significance of digital inclusion today. Initially, there was an intention to collaborate with the Royal Bank of Scotland, but due to unforeseen personal issues with their staff, they adapted by introducing alternative learning topics.

Subsequent sessions focused on digital security, including explanations of cookies, GDPR, and CSR, followed by online shopping and banking. These sessions aimed to alleviate the fear of using social media and online services, which often prevented women from accessing cheaper deals. Limited access to personal transport and few banking facilities outside Dundee City Centre highlighted the importance of these skills.

The women also learned to use basic applications like Word and Excel. They produced letters and posters, created personal and party budgets, and discussed the 70/20/10 savings model, which advocates for allocating 70% of income to necessities, 20% to wants, and 10% to savings or gifting. This part of the program was in partnership with a local organization, the Circle. After the summer holidays, 15 women from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Mozambique, Turkey, China, Zimbabwe, and Romania joined the project. Amina, who led these sessions, simultaneously ran a numeracy project through Multiply during the last three months of 2023. The women enjoyed both sessions so much that some started attending both weekly.

Case Study

One learner, experienced in family businesses, sought to boost her confidence beyond selling cars. She joined the digital class to upskill, make friends, and explore new opportunities. Her teacher recognized her skills and discussed her aspirations, including employment. With advice from the teacher and the Employability Officer, she made her first job application, learned to complete online forms, and effectively showcased her experience. This process boosted her confidence, leading to a successful job interview and offer. Gaining financial independence outside the family business, she invested in her future, pursuing a job aligned with her passion.

Impact Data

72 hours of education and training were provided



16 women reported that they felt an increased sense of belonging in their community

Let's
Grow
Together

4 women felt that their interpersonal skills have improved

