



Supporting The Orkney Community

ANNUAL REPORT

2023 - 2024

www.vaorkney.org.uk

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT



Gerry O'Brien

In this reporting period we have found ourselves 'taking stock and reassessing'. This of course will bring a wave of change, however along with the Board of Directors, we feel this is right time for VAO to make changes to allow us to grow and provide the support needed to our local community groups and charities.

As recently reported in local news, VAO will be taking forward an exciting opportunity to build a new building for Orkney's Third Sector Hub. This brings the opportunity to design and build a building which is adaptable and flexible for our whole Third Sector here in Orkney to use.

We are grateful to our funders for their continued support in what is financially challenging times for us all. Our core work is primarily funded by the Scottish Government and Orkney Islands Council, while a variety of grant funders contribute to our projects.

As you read through this year's report you can see the results from our numerous core activities and project areas that directly affect our communities and how they continue to go from strength to strength.

The huge range of work VAO delivers during the year is only possible because of the support of our members, partners and funders as well as the commitment and hard work of the staff, volunteers and Board.

VAO BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2023-2024

GERRY O'BRIEN.....	CHAIR
STUART WILLIAMS.....	VICE CHAIR
JAN SWAIN.....	TREASURER
JAMES TEMPLE.....	DIRECTOR/TRUSTEE
JANICE ANNAL.....	DIRECTOR/TRUSTEE
WILLIE NEISH.....	DIRECTOR/TRUSTEE
ALISON SHARKEY.....	DIRECTOR/TRUSTEE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT



Morven Brooks

We have experienced increasing challenges with financial and funding pressures, where service demand is growing across our third sector as we continue to navigate through the social challenges presented to us. Use of resources and capacity across our third sector here in Orkney is at all-time high. Further challenges including difficulties in recruitment, then add further strain on being able to deliver vital services.

Our staff team are our greatest asset and believe me when I say this, they put everything into their roles to support our third sector communities here in Orkney. I do hope you enjoy reading the work undertaken and support delivered to people and communities.

Demand for support within our membership is growing, which requires us now to review our membership to ensure it is fit for purpose for our third sector.

As we navigate our way through the challenges, we must remember we are here together and by working collaboratively, we can make a positive impact and difference to the third sector here in Orkney.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Morven Brooks".

OUR FUNDERS

- British Science Week
- Children in Need
- Esmee Fairbairn
- Greenspace Scotland
- Health and Social Care Alliance
- Hugh Fraser
- Liam MacArthur MSP
- Mind on
- Mrs M A Lascelles Charitable Trust
- NHS Orkney
- National Lottery Community Fund
- Orkney Islands Council
- Repsol-Resources UK Limited
- Robertson Trust
- Scottish Government
- Stafford Trust
- Tudor Trust

ABOUT US

OUR VISION

Orkney has sustainable, resilient, inclusive communities with a thriving third sector at their heart.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Our goal is to embed effective collaborative working to create a preventative, joined-up pathway of support. We will develop a sustainable infrastructure for shared decision making, strengthened partnerships and networks thereby building community resilience and ensuring the sustainability of our approaches.

OUR CORE FUNCTIONS

- Building capacity: Developing the capacity of volunteers, community groups, voluntary organisations and social enterprise to achieve positive change
- Source of knowledge: To be a central source of knowledge about the third sector locally
- Connecting partners: Providing leadership, vision and coordination to the local third sector, to better respond to local priorities, including through partnership and collaboration
- Voice of the local third sector: Ensuring a strong local third sector voice at a strategic level within local planning structures and nationally

DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES



Our community development team enjoyed an active year, working to support organisations across Orkney. Whilst the majority of work was undertaken through email or online meetings, we saw a noticeable increase in face-to-face meetings and telephone enquiries.

? 46 organisations advised about legal status

? 45 organisations helped with their governance

129 organisations
309 requests

? 55 organisations helped with funding

? 2 new organisations assisted with setting up

The remaining 163 requests were around business planning, finance and our partnership contribution.

155 sessions support sessions with 55 groups that operate for the benefit of all Orkney

35 sessions support sessions with 21 national groups with an Orkney focus

90 support sessions with 50 groups operating within a more discrete geographical remit within Orkney

TRAINING



Sessions this year covered:

- Fair Work
- Funding
- Governance
- Setting up a charity
- Roles and responsibilities

“ A very informative (How to be Happy Trustee) session and very worthwhile for me. Thanks to you and the VAO team for offering such a useful course!
Caron Oag,
Stromness Museum ”



- 975 contacts were sent the monthly Newsletter
- 547 contacts were sent the monthly Training & Funding Update

FUND MANAGEMENT



COMMUNITIES MENTAL HEALTH WELLBEING FUND

In 2021 as part of the Scottish Government's Recovery and Renewal Fund, a new 2 year Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for adults was announced. Round 3 ran throughout 2023/24 and focussed more on the mental health impacts of the cost of living crisis. Orkney had £75,000 to disburse. A total of 28 applications were received, with a total ask of £182,874, more than double the amount available. As a result 18 projects received funding, with awards of between £475 and £6,900. All of those awarded funding were able to amend their project plans to ensure the core benefits of their projects would still be achievable with a lower level of funding.

The projects funded covered the majority of the isles as well as Mainland Orkney, or are Orkney-wide projects, and range from supporting the LGBTQ+ community to providing a beach wheelchair to make trips to the beach accessible at Inganess. Art and craft projects have benefited alongside those who enjoy sea angling or dancing as a social pastime, or those wanting to start up Men's Shed activities.

A 4th round of the fund has been announced for 2024/25.

SMALL GRANTS SCHEME

The Small Grant Scheme is a fund supported by Repsol Resources UK Ltd and Liam McArthur MSP that we administer. In February, constituted groups with charitable objectives in Orkney were invited to apply for a grant of up to £500 for a project or activity to help their community. This year applications from 20 organisations were selected to receive a grant.



REMEMBERING TOGETHER

In the autumn of 2023, VAO invited artists with experience of creating public art works through the process of co-creation with communities, to apply to lead the delivery of the Scottish Government's national community Covid memorial project in Orkney.

Through community workshops, phase 1 had previously established 5 places in Orkney keen to be involved. This was Flotta, Sanday, Shapinsay, Kirkwall and North Ronaldsay. These communities were clear that the emphasis on the experience of Covid should be less and for artists to work with them to provide contemplative spaces instead without any specific focus.

The art work created will provide space for contemplation, potentially for gatherings, events and happenings. Work on this project is ongoing and will be completed in the autumn of 2024.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



YOUTH AWARDS

We team up with partners from the Youth Workers Forum to organise the Orkney Youth Awards. This year we made 102 awards to the county's youngsters, 51 were Saltire Awards, including 3 prestigious Saltire Summit Awards.

Receiving my 500 hour Saltire Award is a fantastic honour as I am one of few to have received one. It is also good to know that I am making a difference in my local community, especially with other like-minded, friendly people who I enjoy volunteering with.

Tom Kennaugh, volunteer



Saltire AWARDS

INDIVIDUAL PLACEMENTS

Individual volunteer placements help young people gain experience for a career and improve their employment chances. They can also help them to use their spare time well, building their confidence and improving their wellbeing.



120 young people spoken to

Hannah's Story:

Having already volunteered at Clan, Hannah Cockram wanted to study art, fashion and design at university. We found her a placement at Pier Arts Centre. She said: "I wanted exposure to this type of work and atmosphere as much as possible. It's really good to see how artists create so many different types of work, and how they use different media. I'm picking up so much as I go along and it's great for my CV when I'm looking to get into uni."

Carol Dunbar from Pier Arts Centre is in no doubt of the value of volunteers. She said: "When we're hanging a big exhibition such as this (the Christmas Open exhibition) and we're trying to match such a variety of work and of media, it's great to have as many fresh eyes as possible to help with that. There are often job opportunities such as seasonal assistants that volunteers have gone on to do in the past, and being here is also helpful if they're putting together a portfolio for further study."

GET READY TO VOLUNTEER

Get Ready to Volunteer is a course which aims to help young people who need extra support begin their volunteering journey. The concept and benefits of volunteering is introduced first, along with getting to know the young people and their interests and skills. We then move on to planning a group volunteering project.

The course was delivered to a class of 15 young people at Kirkwall Grammar School. They chose to support Women's Aid Orkney by creating Christmas 'pamper packs' for women without family or loved ones. They aimed to produce 15 pamper packs, and in the end, they collected enough items to create nearly 40.

“ We were delighted when the pupils chose to support us and came up with the wonderful idea of making pamper packs for the women we support as Christmas presents. They were very engaged in what we do as a charity and how they could help. They did all the work themselves and the end product was sensational... The pupils did an amazing job and as a charity we were grateful for their help and enthusiasm.

Morgan Maxton, Women's Aid Orkney

The course helps develop the pupils' confidence and skills. As a result of Get Ready to Volunteer, at least 2 of the young people have gone onto do other volunteering placements.

“ We were able to come up with our challenge, and all pupils were able to develop skills such as communication and teamwork.

Amy Johnston, Kirkwall Grammar School

GILBERTSON DAY CENTRE

On Friday afternoons for the past year, a group of young volunteers aged 14-18 have organised activities including games, crafts and quizzes for the old people at the Gilbertson Day Centre.

“ There have been so many new friendships made which is hugely beneficial. A lot of our service users do not have the opportunity to mix with the younger generation through being socially isolated and unable to access any social events outside their own homes.

Kirsty Wallace, Day Centre Manager

“ It's definitely helped me to understand older people and the problems they might face, and how those problems mean you might interact differently with them.

Daisy Cooper, volunteer

KIRKWALL GRAMMAR SCHOOL WIDER ACHIEVEMENT

As part of S5 at Kirkwall Grammar School the pupils are required to choose a wider achievement option and volunteering is one of the choices. We help the school to arrange the placements for those who take part. By participating in this programme, many young people were able to test potential interest in a career.



HAMNAVOE HOUSE






Throughout the year, a group of volunteers aged 15-18 have met after school on a Tuesday to organise activities for the old people in Stromness. This intergenerational group is highly valued by volunteers and the Hamnavoe attendees alike, helping to reduce isolation and give a sense of remaining part of the community. Based at Hamnavoe House Care Home, the group have enjoyed various activities and fun, including cards, dominoes and boccia.

Two of the young people have gone on to employment in care at Hamnavoe House and a third works at Smiddybrae. Many of the other volunteers used the experience gained in their application to study medicine.

ROAR

The ROAR project supports young people in planning, organising and running charity events in the community. It also provides a creative outlet for young people, with many making their first public performances at the events. The group raised £870 for the RNLI, £1137 for the Blide Trust and £275 for the Orkney MS Society.

This year the group organised:

-  a big music night with a charity auction
-  a TV themed quiz in October
-  a 'Christmas Roadshow' for Kirkwall's care homes and day centres



ROAR

YOUTH AND PHILANTHROPY INITIATIVE

We are regional facilitators for The Wood Foundation's Youth and Philanthropy Initiative (YPI) in Orkney. All pupils in S3 at Kirkwall Grammer School and Stromness Academy produce presentations on local charities whose work addresses social issues. They first make contact with their chosen charity at the school's charity fair where they broaden their knowledge of the level and diversity of support offered across the county. They then deliver their presentations and the one deemed best in each school is awarded £3000 for their chosen charity.

“ The money will make an incredible difference to the families in Orkney. We plan to enhance our bereavement room allowing couples to have a more homely, comfortable environment when going through a loss. We will also continue to supply memory boxes to the hospital and finally we will be able to continue maintaining the garden containing The Tree of Tranquillity where parents can go to reflect and remember.

YPI has been a fantastic venture to be involved with. The process has brought local charities together and raised awareness amongst us as charities as well as the pupils, teachers and everyone else involved

Melissa Lindsay, SimBA



YOUTH LOCAL ACTION GROUP

We facilitate the Youth Local Action Group which empowers young people to be the decision makers in putting money towards a particular problem, issue or youth projects. They gain experience and confidence and learn about how funding in the third sector works.

This year, 8 young people aged 16 – 30 took part. The funding opened in January 2024, with £7671.74 in capital and £2328.26 in revenue funding available. A total 9 applications were received and 8 were awarded funding:

- Eday Community Enterprises Ltd / Eday Youth Café
- Inclusive Orkney
- North Isles Dance Academy
- Orkney Athletic and Running Club
- Orkney Charitable Trust
- Orkney Sea Cadets
- Orkney Youth Café
- Sanday Parent Council

VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES



We promote volunteering by raising awareness and supporting organisations in their volunteer recruitment process. We also help individuals on a 1-1 basis with identifying suitable volunteering opportunities matching their needs and interests ensuring successful volunteer placements.



40 opportunities
30 organisations



62 volunteers registered
33 volunteers placed



4,409
volunteering
opportunities
views

The Blide Trust's Story:

We were contacted by The Blide Trust to help them recruit new board members. The volunteer opportunity proved extremely popular and within a matter of days there had been enough expressions of interest. Clare Allison, Service Director at the Blide Trust, said: "VAO was very helpful in supporting us to recruit some new board members. We had a great response to our advert and as a result were able to appoint 3 new people with the sorts of skills and background that we were looking for. Our new recruits are keen to access some training on the roles and responsibilities of being on the board of a charity which VAO are helping us with too."

Volunteers' Week 2023 campaign ran from the 1 to 7 June. During the week, we raised awareness about volunteering in Orkney as well as celebrating and thanking volunteers. Inspirational case studies were shared on our and Facebook page, a promotional window display was installed, and an article about Volunteers' Week was published in The Orcadian newspaper.



**VOLUNTEERS'
WEEK**



YOUNG PEOPLE'S BEFRIENDING PROJECT



Our volunteer Befrienders offer their young people a trusted and steadfast friend with a listening ear, and an encouraging voice. They help them to take steps towards independence and to develop new skills. This boosts their confidence, self-worth, and wellbeing, enabling them to feel included and accepted in their community, increasing their access to opportunities. This year we worked with 23 young people.



11 supported in
1-1 matches



12 supported
by group work

Steph and Alaina's* story:

Alaina* recently transitioned to secondary school but was becoming more and more isolated from her peers – she had Down's Syndrome and found it difficult to participate in the activities and clubs that her peers enjoyed.

She was matched to Steph, a young volunteer in her 30's who's energetic and enthusiastic personality was a wonderful fit for Alaina*. They hit it off immediately and have gone on to enjoy a wide range of activities together – swimming, falconry, baking, crafts, games, and story writing. They have grown a trusting and caring friendship in a relatively short amount of time. At her most recent review, Alaina* said: "I really like Steph, she's the best."

Alaina's* family also said: "Steph has been super at doing activities that Alaina* really loves. Steph has been really good at communicating with us and Alaina* enjoys her company. Steph has been a really good match for her."



During their relatively short match (6 months), Alaina* and Steph have formed a really lovely bond. Alaina* has been able to be involved in her community in a way that she wasn't able to previously, and she has grown in confidence and self-esteem as a result.

* The name has been changed to protect the privacy of the child or young person.

CONNECT PROJECT



The transition between school and becoming a young adult can be a challenging time. Some young people face additional barriers which means they need to approach their next steps at a pace that is right for them. Connect offers a welcoming and safe space for young people to feel more positive and ready to make good decisions for themselves.

This year we worked with 26 young people. Some took part for the duration of our summer programme only and others were supported through our longer bespoke learning programme. Our activities included visiting new places, travelling independently or communicating with others. Some young people also volunteered helping them to develop new skills and confidence as well as make a difference in their community.



“ I put my confidence at 1/10 a year ago but now I feel so different that I can't even remember feeling that way.

Young Person ”

“ Everyone here understands that we are all going through stuff and dealing with it the best way we can, even if that is a bit different from other people.

Young Person ”

“ Volunteering has helped me gain confidence in a working environment, improve my communication, and I'm happy to be of help.

Young Person ”

The families and carers of our young people have seen a positive change.

“ It's been a while since I saw them happy to get up and out the house by themselves to take part in something.

Family member / carer of a young person ”



ISLAND WELLBEING PROJECT



The Island Wellbeing Project is a partnership between VAO, Island Development Trusts, OHAC and HIE. It coordinates health and wellbeing support across the ferry linked isles of Hoy, Westray, Sanday, Stronsay, Shapinsay, Rousay, Egilsay and Wyre through Wellbeing Coordinators.

The project is currently funded by Esmée Fairbairn, The Tudor Trust, The Integration Joint Board and the island Development Trusts.



Outcome 1: There is an increase in the number of preventative community-led wellbeing initiatives, that residents in Orkney's ferry-linked isles access



Outcome 2: Partnerships between community, voluntary, public, private and cultural organisations are strengthened within and across the isles



Outcome 3: Local people exert more influence over the decisions that affect their lives and their communities

During the past 12 months the coordinators have helped 36 groups/wellbeing initiatives to either set-up or continue.



In Rousay the coordinator identified the need to source a podiatry provider. The first session only had 2 empty places and following that all places have been taken on every visit



The coordinator in Stronsay organised taster events during World Health Week, ranging from health awareness sessions and talks to walks, music, swimming, craft, creative writing, gardening and singing



In Shapinsay and Rousay the coordinators have helped to set up a chair-based movement group (Active Movers) in partnership with Orkney Dance and Fitness



Shapinsay's coordinator supported the development of a Men's Shed Group where around 20 men now meet weekly

The project has been looking to the future, with long term sustainability as a priority for continued support to the residents of the ferry linked isles with this vital service.

ORKNEY MONEY MATTERS



Orkney Money Matters was established in September 2022 and was designed collaboratively as a partnership between key statutory and third sector organisations. It is firmly embedded within the Community Planning Partnership and reports directly to the partnership's board, which also operates with an Orkney-wide focus.

The first phase of the project concluded in May 2024 and was funded by the Local Authority Covid-19 Economic Recover (LACER) fund and The Trussell Trust's Pathways to Advice and Cash Scotland programme.

The project aimed to reduce levels of financial insecurity in Orkney by increasing access to advice and cash for those experiencing or at risk of crisis through improvement of local 'advice-and-cash-first' referral pathways. It supports outreach and advice activities of third sector organisations. Capacity in THAW, Citizen's Advice Bureau and The Blide Trust was increased using the funding to boost access to support and advice.

The project has now secured a Flexible Cash Fund from the Scottish Government that will allow the support provided to be extended to both short-term and longer-term crisis support. There will be a total of £60,000 in cash-first support available to the community through THAW in the coming year.

TECH PEER MENTOR PROJECT



The Tech Peer Mentor project concluded in July 2023. Funded by the Transforming Local Systems (TLS) Programme. It promoted awareness, understanding, and uptake of Technology Enabled Care (TEC solutions in service delivery) in Orkney. It achieved this by providing support with digital skills or with using technology that did not require any digital skills, leading to significant benefits for individuals and their family members.

The TEC library helped to raise awareness of the technology available and gave the community an opportunity to learn more about it and its uses in health and social care. Items from the library can now be hired from Selbro Resource Centre, Scotts Road, Hatston, Kirkwall, KW15 1GR.

COMMUNITY LINK PRACTITIONER SERVICE



Community Link Practitioners work within GP practices in Orkney and are part of the practice team. The project is funded by the Primary Care Improvement Plan and the team are employed by Voluntary Action Orkney, bridging the gap between GP practices and communities.

Working 1-1 with clients referred from the GP Practices, our role is very varied. It can include linking clients with community groups, services and resources available locally and nationally to support with issues such as debt, housing, social isolation, loneliness and low mood.



123 Referrals



184 Clients
engaged with



101 clients
moved on

Through the service, clients have been able to learn or improve skills that positively impact on their quality of life and enable them to be more independent. As their confidence and belief in themselves and their abilities grow, they feel both mentally and physically better, and this sees a reduction in appointments with their GP.

“The Community Link Practitioner role has proven to be an invaluable resource... Having someone who is aware of the other vital services within our community, and who can help our patients to navigate that path alongside building up their confidence and self-esteem where necessary, ensures that our patient's social and other needs are addressed, freeing up GP time to address medical needs. The role requires a unique set of skills, as it's widely varied but so very valued.

Babs Womack, Heilendi Practice



ADULT BEFIENDING SERVICE



The project aimed to reduce loneliness and isolation among adults in Orkney, and to help them to live independently, staying in their own homes as long as possible.

The Adult Befriending Service was unsuccessful in obtaining funding beyond 30 September 2023 and the decision was made to close the project.

1-1 BEFRIENDING

The team matched volunteer befrienders with people who were lonely, significantly socially isolated and had very limited or no support around them. This helped them to be more connected in their community, increase their social connections and reduce their feelings of loneliness. Up until the end of September, 20 successful matches were supported with 2 moving on to becoming natural friendships. Many volunteers have continued to see their befriendees following the closure of the project.

GROUP BEFRIENDING

The team ran 2 weekly befriending groups for people over 60. Attendees played Scrabble, Dominoes, cards, bingo, took part in quizzes or chair-based exercise. They also enjoyed entertainment including visits from speakers. These activities helped to improve the mental health and well-being of the attendees.

Since September, the groups have continued on their own supported by a young volunteer from our Connect Project.

INTERGENERATIONAL GROUP BEFRIENDING

The intergenerational groups delivered in partnership with the 2 of largest primary schools in the Mainland continued to be successful. Different generations came together in purposeful activities promoting respect and reciprocal learning. The pupils learned valuable skills from the older members of their community and vice versa. This challenged stereotypical opinions such as 'boring', 'slow', 'grey' and 'grumpy' and changed to 'kind', 'caring', 'cool' and 'fun'. Values including empathy, patience, respect, tolerance and compassion were encouraged.

After the closure of the project in September Developing the Young Workforce are working to create intergenerational opportunities .

ISLAND SELF MANAGEMENT GROUP



The Island Self-Management Group (ISMG) was a cross-island, virtual self-management group for people with long term physical health conditions. Funding for this project was provided by the Self-Management Fund for Scotland administered on behalf of the Scottish Government by the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE). The project started in 2021 and ended in November 2023 when the funding came to an end.

The group had 17 members. They came from across the isles with participants attending from Westray, Sanday, Stronsay, Graemsay, Shapinsay, Eday, Orphir, Papa Westray, North Ronaldsay and Hoy.

“ The majority of local support services and groups (statutory or voluntary/charities) are Mainland Orkney based. There is a lack of offer on the islands, so I have really valued the opportunity to access support.

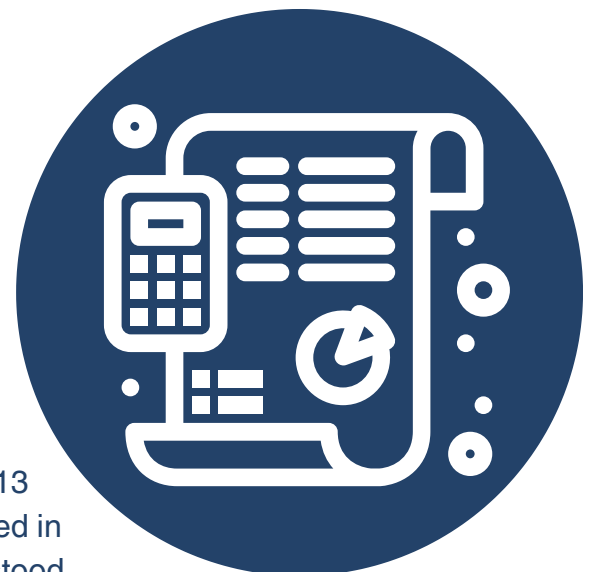
Island Self-Management Group Member

Had further funding been successfully acquired, many of the participants would have wanted to group to continue. Unfortunately, this was not possible at the time the funding concluded.

However, the learning and reflections gained by this 2 year project have been of interest to key stakeholders within NHS Orkney and we will continue to explore ways of supporting this work in the future.

FINANCE

Voluntary Action Orkney had total incoming resources of £945,513 for the year compared to incoming resources of £821,396 reported in the previous year. Unrestricted funds at the balance sheet date stood at £268,223, including £46,822 of designated funds, while restricted funds totalled £515,009.



The Board are committed to build an adequate reserves account to allow for organisational contingencies and to demonstrate good financial management and has implemented a reserves policy.



Supporting The Orkney Community

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