



A Connected Scotland – Tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections

Corra Foundation response

Corra Foundation’s mission is to make a difference to people and communities across Scotland, by encouraging positive change, opportunities, fairness and growth of aspirations, which improve quality of life. With 33 years of grant making experience, Corra Foundation has contributed to improving the lives of individuals and communities across Scotland and in developing countries.

In 2017 28% of Corra Foundation’s own funding supported groups with an outcome of reducing isolation. 44% of groups funded through Corra Foundation in 2017 reported on how they helped to reduce isolation.



The People in Place programme aims to reach places in Scotland that independent funders historically do not reach. The programme aims to get alongside communities and support them to create opportunities for people to participate, come together and ultimately create positive change. In 2017 the people in place Community Co-ordinators made formal connections with 950 people through face to face connections.



The Henry Duncan Grants supports grassroots charities in Scotland supporting vulnerable children and young people, isolated older people, carers, families experiencing poverty or people affected by disability or mental health issues. Over the last three years, 30% of Henry Duncan Grants have supported groups working with older people facing social isolation.



The Partnership Drugs Initiative (PDI) promotes voluntary sector work with vulnerable children and young people affected by substance issues. In the last three years a high proportion of Partnership Drugs Initiative (PDI) funded groups reported helping people they worked with reduce their isolation. PDI funded groups reported over half the people they supported to achieve outcomes were accessing community activities to help reduce their isolation.



Corra Foundation has gathered significant grant-making skills and expertise over its 33 year history and we are committed to sharing that with others in our sector. We do this by offering delivery and support services to our fellow grant-makers, or to people developing new grant-making programmes.

Broad questions

Q1. What needs to change in your community to reduce social isolation and loneliness and increase the range and quality of social connections?

Availability of spaces

There are big issues in relation to communities having spaces where they can come together. As well as the physical issues around availability of spaces, there is also the need for engagement activity (for example Community Development) to encourage and support people to access the spaces. Some of the work being done through Corra Foundation's People in Place programme has demonstrated the impact of this, for example in one area the programme has supported a community centre to reopen and has worked with local people so that they are beginning to make use of the centre and to develop activities themselves.



People in Place, Dunterlie, East Renfrewshire

“I would also say that it is key to highlight that for some people the centre was an important space, some were nostalgic, some ambivalent but there was no choice to interact – the centre being closed all the time removed the choice. I feel like in my area at the moment just having a choice to do something is a step towards creating change.”

Learning from the People in Place programme suggests that community spaces should be ‘agenda free’ and focus on encouraging people with shared interests to come together. For instance, where possible encouraging spaces to be used by all members of the community rather than being presented as a space only for people who recognise themselves as isolated or vulnerable. How a service is presented within a community is an important consideration when it comes to tackling the stigma associated with isolation. Attempts to engage with seldom heard, isolated groups may be hindered if services are not mindful of the impact language can have.

Detailed questions

Context

Priority 1 – Empower Communities to Lead

Q. Are you aware of any good practice in a local community to build social connections that you want to tell us about?

Corra Foundation’s vision is for a society in which people create positive change and enjoy fulfilling lives.

- Small grant funding can be a key enabler for grassroots community groups, allowing them to provide vital, safe spaces that meets local needs. Grant funding that can cover the costs of rent, heating and lighting can help to ensure spaces can be utilised and enjoyed by the community.
- Corra Foundation has funded a high number of HomeStart groups (18 over the last three years) that help parents feel less isolated.



HomeStart Renfrewshire case study, Henry Duncan Grant funded.

Christine is a mum of three children, two girls and one boy, with two of the children under 5. She was brought up in the care system from about the age of 10. She became pregnant and had her first child at the age of 18 with no support from the father. Christine then met her second partner and went on to have two more children. Her partner was very controlling and made her believe she was mentally unstable. She eventually threw him out when the emotional abuse turned physical.

Home-Start got involved after a referral from the Health Visitor with main priority being nurturing support for Christine. Her volunteer went out on a weekly basis for about a year. Christine and the volunteer very quickly built up a good relationship as did the volunteer and all three of the children. With lots of emotional support and reassurance from the volunteer Christine, mum started to feel better about herself.

- Corra Foundation Community Co-ordinators have helped to connect people to existing groups and opportunities in their local areas including linking people to local bowling club or gardening groups.
- Community Co-ordinators engaged with people who felt 'seldom heard' in their local area to connect and volunteer with community activities.
- Across Corra Foundation's work, community transport is an area that is frequently highlighted as making a significant difference in helping people to participate and access support, particularly older people.



BANDF (Barrhead and Neilston Disability Forum) People in Place, Dunterlie, East Renfrewshire.

BANDF is a social group for individuals over the age of 65 with disabilities and support requirements. The group is volunteer-run, they receive a very small amount of funding from a range of sources and also receive some support from East Renfrewshire Council's Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP). This support has enabled the group to access appropriate transport and the support of qualified care staff.

For many of their members independent travel is impossible; they do not have the networks or resources to access individual supported travel. For many of the group members, there are limited opportunities for social interaction and the support they receive at the group creates one opportunity a week to enjoy time with others in a community setting.

Corra Foundation's People in Place team also facilitated an intergenerational project with the BANDF group and a group of pupils from St John's Primary school just before Christmas. 'This is my happy place' was a story sharing project which supported generations to come together to socialise and exchange stories about the places that make them happy. The aim of the project was to support the young people from St John's to learn about their community, to develop storytelling and interview skills and to bring people together to explore what makes their place great. The project also helped local young people to participate in the First Ministers' Reading Challenge. The BANDF project have had limited opportunities to engage with the wider community and creating this space helped people to get to know their neighbours, find out more about what is going on in the community and make positive connections with other people in Dunterlie.



Gentlemen’s bowling group, People in Place, Fernhill, South Lanarkshire.

The bowling group provides the men with weekly opportunities to socialise with others of a similar age in a fun environment.

“The group gives people, many of whom feel stress at home, a chance to get out and about to have a joke with some old or even new friends. Some of the men have no wives and were sitting in the house so it gets them out for a bit of laugh” (Rutherglen Reformer article, February 2018).

- PDI funded groups reported over half the people they supported to achieve outcomes were accessing community activities to help reduce their isolation.
- PDI evidence over the years has illustrated the importance of developing supportive relationships can help people develop confidence and access opportunities.



Clued Up, Partnership Drugs Initiative funded.

Megan is 17 years old and lives with her grandparents. Megan’s relationship with her mum is strained. Megan was referred to the PDI funded project after being admitted to hospital for taking street Valium. Megan was not engaged in education was misusing alcohol and drugs.

Megan has been supported to help her focus on her future aspirations, boosting her confidence and giving her a forum to talk through problems and seek new positive ways of thinking.

Megan enrolled in college and is attending regularly. She has formed new friendships at college and has shown increased confidence. Megan is working hard to gain qualifications and is aiming to for a career in social work or youth work.

Priority 2 – Play our part

Q. How can we all work together to challenge stigma around social isolation and loneliness, and raise awareness of it as an issue? Are there examples of people doing this well that you’re aware of?

Corra Foundation's work alongside communities and the third sector has found that stigma can be a key issue affecting how people access and engage with support. Challenging stigma requires a shift in community support and attitudes. Access, language and appropriate safe spaces are all key factors in reaching and engaging with socially isolated people and challenging stigma.

- Language is a key component when considering how community support is presented. People may not identify themselves as lonely or isolated so if a service makes direct reference to tackling isolation or supporting vulnerable groups, people may be reluctant to engage as they do not see themselves fitting this description.



People in Place, Langlees, Falkirk.

The People in place team working in Bainford and Langlees were interested in finding out why the number of people making use of the local soup kitchen was declining. Following feedback from community members, the community co-ordinators found that people did not want to use the community soup kitchen because they associated it with homelessness and poverty. The name has now changed to 'natter and bite to eat'. By altering the language and promoting a safe space that welcomes all local people to come along, have some food and meet other people, they have managed to engage a wider group of people who can benefit from the service.

- There needs to be greater awareness of the different causes of social isolation, for example: poverty, learning and physical disability, drugs and alcohol, mental health, and the stigma that could be associated with these. Stigma can be a catalyst for and a symptom of social isolation.
- Stigma by association can hinder people's efforts to engage with community events. For example, PDI has found that children and young people may feel stigmatised as a consequence of their parents' drug or alcohol use.
- Access to services and community activities is an important factor when it comes to challenging stigma and promoting inclusion. Currently those in drug or alcohol recovery are not entitled to free bus passes which could present a barrier in terms of their engagement in local initiatives as well as the feeling of stigma that comes from not having the same entitlement as people with, for example, mental health problems.
- Stigma is a significant challenge to tackling social isolation and loneliness. It seems likely that a concerted campaign (similar to 'see me') may be needed if Scotland is to significantly shift the attitudes and behaviours that underlie this stigma. This will require resource and the draft strategy does not appear to have any additional resource attached to it.

Q. Using Carnegie UK Trust's report as a starting point, what more should we be doing to promote kindness as a route to reducing social isolation and loneliness?

Learning from Corra Foundation's People in Place programme highlights that there is a need to find out what motivates people to build connections and engage. This has been reflected in the opportunities that communities have been creating to enable people to connect, participate and build confidence. For example, cookery courses, craft groups and local history projects. These types of activities help to bring people together around shared interests in a way that supports understanding and relationships to develop and grow, including between different groups within communities. This in turn can help to break down barriers and nurture community cohesion.



Queensferry Churches Care in the Community Project, Henry Duncan Grant funded.

Queensferry Churches Care in the Community offers day care, as well as running a Memory Café and supper club. The supper club is for couples where one partner has dementia. It offers an opportunity for couples to leave the house and have a meal together in an understanding environment; an activity that may otherwise be difficult. The club was formed following feedback from carers saying they missed the opportunity to go out and socialise. This work provides a safe space to nurture existing relationships as well as providing a shared experience, connecting carers and those with dementia to each other.

Q. What do we need to be doing more of (or less of) to ensure that we tackle social isolation and loneliness for specific life stages and groups?

There is a need for support at transitional points in life as these can be points at which people experience greater risk of isolation and loneliness, for example if they move from one area to another, leave or change school, start a family or retire. There also needs to be recognition of the barriers specific groups may experience.

- Isolation can occur when circumstances change and people are no longer able to do the things they used to. For instance, when networks change, retirement, the death of a spouse all present difficult transitions.
- When considering experiences of isolation; gender and age are important factors and could impact how people engage with services. For instance, learning from grassroots projects has highlighted the importance of services for older men that may not have previously engaged with services.



Fort William Men's Shed, Henry Duncan Grant funded

Fort William Men's Shed offers men a non-threatening space to interact and build social connections whilst recognising the issues affecting men once they have retired, such as a decline in social opportunities and feeling isolated.

"I was getting depressed because I was in the house myself. I was getting depressed and I was worrying about this - and worrying about that. I kept going backward and forward to the doctor, and then she says, 'Well, look. There's a phone number, it's called the Men's Shed'... So I phoned up and he says, 'Well come down and have a look.' So I came down, had a look, had a cup of tea, and I've never been away."

- There is a need for more 'through care' approaches to support people with life transitions. For example, encouraging dialogue with people about what to expect when changing school, moving into employment, starting a family and retiring and making them aware of where they could find support. It is important to equip people with the skills and knowledge to cope with the changes and possible challenges of different life stages, helping people to move through transitions 'safely'.
- Different approaches work for different people. Some people have good interpersonal skills and are able to develop friendships if they are offered the opportunity. For example, providing the chance to meet and get together with others. Local groups that enable people to come together around shared interests are important. On the other hand, some people may lack the skills for building friendships and that is when a more structured approach to relationships, for example through befriending, may be helpful.



Glasgow Panthers Wheelchair Sports Club #letschangethat competition entry.

Based in Easterhouse in Glasgow, Glasgow Panthers are a wheelchair rugby team. The team aims to support men and women of all ages to get involved in the sport. As well as the physical benefits of taking part in wheelchair rugby, Glasgow panthers works to be inclusive by removing the barriers that disabled people may experience preventing them from taking part in social activities.



Rathbone training limited CYPFEIF & ALEC funded.

Rathbone training limited deliver a TOPS programme (Training Opportunities for Young Parents) which helps support young parents to develop new transferable skills.

'When I joined TOPs I was referred through a mum & baby unit I lived in. I was always staying in as I felt uncomfortable with the type of people who attended the local parenting groups. I felt like I had no skills and no employable skills to show because I always got sacked for not being good enough. When I had my son I felt like a bad parent due to past experience and social work involvement, however, once I started attending sessions at TOPs I started to grow more confident, made friends and had fun. I learned new skills and became a better parent and started getting glowing reports at social work meetings, the staff were great and gave me advice whenever I needed an ear, and soon enough I started to believe in myself and learn that anything was possible if I put my mind to it. Now I have transferable skills, a new house on the way and a new outlook on life and I have started college.'

Q. How can we ensure that the social care sector contributes to tackling social isolation and loneliness?

Social care services must be allowed to focus on relationships, and for this to happen more time is needed. While the role of formal care is essential, there is also substantial value in informal activities.

- Corra Foundation’s work within communities suggests that there is a trend towards face-to-face support being delivered by phone instead. While this can work very well, for some people it will not offer the same quality of interaction. However support is delivered, there is a need for time to allow people and those who support them to get to know each other.
- Learning from the People in Place programme suggests that there can be barriers created by fears about risk and a drive to formalise activities. This may stifle the energy of communities themselves to respond and, ultimately can prevent effective, community-led activity from happening. An example of this may be an informal group having to undertake risk assessments before coming together for activities such as walking or sport. This can create unnecessary barriers to people being able to self-organise and access green spaces locally.



Food Train Ltd, #Letschangethat competition entry.

Food train is one example of an organisation that has explored some of the issues around social isolation in communities as it involves food preparation by volunteers in their own homes which is then provided to older people. The ‘meal makers’ project recruits volunteers to cook meals and then agree a time to bring a portion round to a local person aged over 55, helping to build social connections within the community.

- Local services, such as GP’s, have a role to play in reducing isolation and loneliness, particularly as they are well placed to identify people who might need support. They need to be able to notice, recognise and refer people in the direction of support and opportunities. There are many examples of these types of initiatives within Scotland (for example the National Links Worker programme), however in some communities, including some the People in Place work within, the issue is that there is not the local support to signpost or refer people to.
- Both crisis and preventative/early intervention support, including accessibly within people’s local communities, have a key role to play. There are continuing concerns

that as support retracts people may be less able to access support early. Both statutory and voluntary sector support (for example for mental health) has lengthy waiting lists and if people do not get support when they need it they may not engage with services again.

Q. What more can we do to encourage people to get involved in local groups that promote physical activity?

Asset based approaches have a key role to play in enabling more physical activity within communities. For instance, promoting the physical assets of a local area and making use of these spaces for community activities and projects. It is also important that people in a community feel able to take ownership of their communal spaces. For instance, having appropriate spaces to store resources that can be used for activities can be key.

When undertaking regeneration projects local authorities should be encouraged to consider how the physical environment can help and hinder social engagement, for instance being mindful of simple things like street lighting, hedge and grass cuttings.

Language is an important consideration and projects should be mindful about how they promote initiatives that aim to increase physical activity. For instance, there may be greater engagement if an activity appeals to common interests such as gardening or sports, rather than exercise.



People in Place, Buckhaven, Fife

The Levenmouth Community Cycling Group came about as a result of a conversation with a community member. They expressed a wish to set up an affordable and accessible family cycling group which would organise local rides for families and if they wanted or needed to they could borrow a bike. There was then a roadshow at the local high school in November with other local partners too, the police, Fife Gingerbread among others.

Since then, the group have successfully secured funding, organised a number of rides which have all been well attended, engaging people from four years old to sixty eight years old. The group are now affiliated to Cycling UK who are supporting them with training and publicity too. A number of those who have joined have not cycled for years, and have not had the opportunity until now to take out children or grandchildren on a cycle ride before.

Q. How can we better ensure that our services that support children and young people are better able to identify where someone may be socially isolated, and capable of offering the right support?

Learning from Corra Foundation's work reinforces the central importance of children and young people being listened to and able to develop strong, trusting relationships with adults in their lives.

[Everyone Has a Story](#), a Partnership Drugs Initiative action research project delivered by Corra Foundation in partnership with the Scottish Government and The Robertson Trust, explored the views and support needs of children and young people whose parent/carer was at any stage of recovery from drug and/or alcohol addiction.

- The project highlighted that by actively listening to the views and experiences of children and young people we can better understand their needs and what is important to them.
- The project worked closely with children and young people's practitioners, and found that children and young people will share their stories on their own terms, in a safe space and where there is trust.

- The findings from the research illustrate the importance of services not making assumptions before taking actions and that there is value in simply listening to children and young people.
- The practitioners involved in the research project developed a five question toolkit which provides a framework to help workers consider what is important to that child or young person and what we can learn from their experience.

Q. What are the barriers presented by the lived environment in terms of socially connecting? How can these be addressed?

Insights from Corra Foundation’s People in Place programme and Partnership Drugs Initiative suggest a range of barriers associated with a lack of spaces for people to come together within their communities and transport issues.

- Lack of access to spaces that are free from agenda or costs. For instance some community members may perceive certain spaces to be exclusive. There is a need for more local spaces to be freely available and accessible to the whole community this could include spaces like schools, churches or other public buildings.
- A lack of cafes, local shops and libraries can be a source of isolation as these can be important assets for a community.
- Lack of street furniture/benches that enable people to sit informally.
- Transport barriers, including restrictive timetables and cost. Learning from PDI funded projects has highlighted that the cost of transport can be a key source of isolation for some people, and have found in some areas transport is so expensive individuals cannot attend local support groups. Transport can also be a barrier for organisations supporting people in rural areas and can often mean that funding is required to cover the cost of travelling to collect people to engage in a project or deliver outreach work.
- Time is an issue for some people. For instance if they are working, looking after a family or caring for someone it may be difficult for them to find time for social activities.

Some of the potential means of addressing these issues include:

- A knowledge of the community landscape is essential in understanding local issues and needs. For instance, where public transport is limited it is important to explore the impact on local people’s opportunities to engage in activities and services.
- Where there is a lack of shared community space, community co-ordinators working in People in Place teams have found that using social media, such as Facebook, can be a useful tool for engaging with people. For instance, the Castlehill Facebook page is a forum for people to connect, promote local activities and showcase positive work taking place in the community.

- Action that helps communities feel real ownership of facilities, rather than them being viewed as belonging to councils.
- Councils and leisure trusts providing free access to spaces so that communities can come together. This is sometimes undermined because of business models or income generation targets which do not support spaces being well used by communities.
- Make sure the physical space within a community is supportive of people coming into contact with each other, for example giving careful consideration to things like street layouts, boundary lines, hedges and areas such as community notice boards where information can be shared.
- Consideration of the link between social isolation and loneliness and the economic development of an area. For example in areas where shops are all closed people have less reason to leave their homes. Communities need to have businesses such as cafes, post offices, shops, banks etc. so that there are reasons to go out and there is human interaction when they do go out.