

BUCKHAVEN

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING - WHAT WE'VE LEARNED



SNAPSHOT

Throughout 2020, the community of Buckhaven have continued to support one another and build on the brilliant work that has been happening over the last few years. The coronavirus pandemic brought challenging times through which community members stepped up and helped one another. The pandemic also encouraged new ideas and opportunities from using digital technology to continue baking together, to reaching out across Scotland and taking part in conversations about food inequality.

Corra Foundation has supported local groups and organisations to respond to the challenges presented by coronavirus through providing signposting and access to funding, as well as continued on the ground capacity building and strengthening community connections. Corra funding supported local groups, such as a group helping vulnerable and elderly community members, who were experiencing loneliness and isolation, to engage differently when face to face work was no longer possible and the setting up of a new community group who are focusing on improving outdoor spaces for young people and community allotments for all.

The Supporting Communities Fund helped the emergency food response in Levenmouth to expand their provision and also supported smaller emergency food services to develop and expand what they were able to offer, such as the Baptist Church. As funding shifted to recovery, organisations were supported to look at how they could “build back better” and use the pandemic to reassess their scope, how they work, and what the future looks like.

Community members have also been working alongside Nourish Scotland on a project to research the cost of food for different households, taking into account systemic costs such as transport, fuel, and time.



In November, 24 community members from Buckhaven and 9 representatives from organisations working in the area, met on Zoom to take part in a Roots Programme conversation with Ruth Ibegbuna.

Ruth facilitated a conversation focussed on bringing together people with a connection to Buckhaven to see how, through discussion, issues and challenges could be addressed to make life better for everyone in Buckhaven. This was the first time such an event has taken place in Buckhaven, and the extra challenge of asking people to spend over two hours on Zoom should not be underestimated. There was a real energy and commitment from everyone who took part, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Comments afterwards were: "it was great to hear about all the fantastic things happening in our community right now", "we might be a small town with big challenges, but the community spirit is really strong", "people from outside of the community often don't give us credit for all the good stuff here". It was recognised that there is incredible value in these types of facilitation opportunities, as they provide a much needed space to hear voices and wisdom. The evident pride that people have in Buckhaven also surfaced throughout the conversation.

As a direct result of the conversation, and the contributions made by a young person who took part in the session, a youth engagement programme for young people in Buckhaven is being developed in partnership with Levenmouth Academy and Buckhaven Primary School. This is an exciting project being led by Rachel Morrison, a creative arts specialist who is based in Levenmouth and is also director of the Buckhind Players.

Despite the obvious challenges with access to schools and young people in the current circumstances, Rachel is making great progress and we look forward to following this project over the next few months.

Engaging Flexibly

While it was brilliant to be able to move the bakery sessions onto Zoom for the year, digital baking wasn't for everyone and we were sorry that some of the bakers didn't join each week. For those bakers who opted out of the Zoom sessions, we kept in touch by phone and text messages and even managed some "bakery walks" in the nearby beautiful Silverburn Park when government restrictions allowed. Having the relationships already well established in the group prior to March 2020 meant that it was easier to keep in touch with everyone and check in regularly.

Other groups also benefitted from the use of technology and important conversations were able to continue with the primary school through this exceptionally challenging time via Microsoft Teams. This meant that the local Co-ordinator could be kept fully updated with how the school and the school community were navigating their way through the pandemic, and it ensured that new pieces of work could be supported, for example the Smart Play Network (SPN) project starting now in Buckhaven. This exciting project will work with SPN, Buckhaven Primary School and has been supported by Corra Foundation and CLEAR Buckhaven, who have offered the Globe Garden as a suitable venue for the outdoor learning sessions to take place. Outdoor clothing and wellies have been purchased through the Corra Ideas into Action fund, so that all children will be able to take part and gain maximum enjoyment and benefit from the outdoor sessions, despite the weather!

What have we learned together?

Using expertise across networks

It was essential to move quickly in March 2020, and by using the existing connections and relationships within Buckhaven, individuals and organisations were able to respond to the immediate needs of the community. One of the first actions was to reach out to groups and organisations working on the front line in the community and offer help with accessing Scottish Government emergency funding in response to the virus. This made it possible to rapidly identify key community groups and settings who needed money immediately to help those most in need. A key piece of learning for the Community Co-ordinator working for a funder was the perfect opportunity that this role had to combine the local knowledge accrued through the work alongside people in Buckhaven and the knowledge of government funds, some being directly distributed through Corra Foundation, to maximise the benefit to the early community response to coronavirus. This resulted in funding reaching those most adversely affected by the pandemic far quicker than may otherwise have been the case.

Flexible communication is key

While the benefits of digital engagement were clearly evident across a range of groups and individuals, the digital divide was very apparent. With this in mind support was provided for a wonderful community group to continue sending weekly handwritten cards to those in the community who didn't, for a host of reasons, use online means to keep in touch and were therefore very isolated and lonely. These cards were a lifeline to many and through a relatively simple and inexpensive way, maintained a vital connection for people.

For so many who we work alongside in Buckhaven, being part of a weekly group is really important to them and their wellbeing, and the suspension of these groups has had a very negative impact. One small way to offset this has been regular phone calls. A good chat has been so beneficial over the past few months and although may seem a bit "old school" sometimes lifting the phone can be just what's needed.



Through the Ideas into Action Fund (a small grants fund available to support community led ideas) Rachel-Jane Morrison, a local theatre maker and social arts practitioner was funded to lead a six-week pilot drama programme in Buckhaven. Rachel-Jane contacted and met with the manager of Contact Point, a local organisation working from their premises in Buckhaven to support adults with additional support needs and mental health issues, and sessions were set up for Wednesday evenings.

During week 1 the cast explored basic drama skills, building confidence and having fun, and were encouraged to have a go at light-hearted tasks which were planned by Rachel to boost confidence and leave them feeling uplifted. During weeks 2, 3, 4 they progressed into harder tasks and worked on using the skills and confidence they were learning to decide what our final sharing of work would be.

We decided as a group to create our own soap opera with a small script and to film it as an episode. During week 5, we encountered some confidence issues and the show changed direction, however the rest of the group felt confident enough to come up with a new idea on the spot and put those devising skills they had learned to good use. Therefore, "Finding Love On Lawrence Street" was born, a nod to the once popular Blind Date! Week 6 was a big one, we hosted a film premier and a red-carpet event for the group, giving them the VIP experience with a Shloer on arrival and walking the red carpet, before sitting down to enjoy the groups work. We then enjoyed a mock Oscars ceremony where every participant was awarded a certificate and a trophy for taking part, presented to them by Rachel in front of their friends and family.

Reflections on the project-

Participants strongly agreed that taking part in this project has benefitted their social wellbeing.

Participants also strongly agreed that their confidence had increased through taking part in the project. With one participant commenting: "I wasn't as confident before I came into this wee group, even when I was at the job centre the other day they said about how much happier and confident I look, even my husband, I never thought he would get involved but he has. He's totally got involved and it was outside his comfort zone, he likes things written down so it was nice to see him enjoying improvising".

All participants agreed that they would you take part in another project similar to this one. One person commented that the most enjoyable part of taking part in the project for them was "the laughter".

Plans were afoot for the group to continue and work together on a new multimedia production "Dreams" which should have been staged at Lochgelly Arts Centre during Mental Health Awareness Week in March 2020, but due to coronavirus this had to be put on hold. The group are staying in touch with each other and are already planning to get back together again, when restrictions allow, so watch this space!



What happens next?

In 2021, Buckhaven will be supported by Corra, but with an arms length approach. The successful community capacity building and development work that community members and partners have completed over the past three and a half years makes this possible.



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Corra Place team colleagues will be supporting some of the more strategic work, such as The River Leven Project which the Community Co-ordinator was previously involved in, but the emphasis has firmly shifted to community members driving progress forward in Buckhaven, supported in the wings if necessary by the Place Team.

People in Place - moving forwards

People in Place continue to work alongside nine communities in Scotland, supporting local people to connect, collaborate on ideas and take action to create positive change. The local activity and learning from each community help shape plans for the place, the wider programme and policy.

Coronavirus has brought additional challenges to communities and amplified existing inequalities. Across each community the themes of participation, voice and space continue to be evident. Similar challenges were observed across the communities because of coronavirus, including food insecurity, digital access, and financial concerns. Within each community, individuals, groups, and organisations responded quickly, coordinating support to those that required it, through local knowledge, connections, and access to resources. The pandemic has evidenced the importance and value of communities coming together, having a say in decisions and control over resources, and opened new relationships with local government.

Community Co-ordinators were able to support local responses by helping to connect community members together with groups and partner organisations through the relationships established prior to the pandemic. Adaptability in approach was also key as well as providing support with accessing available funding.

Corra will continue to support communities to connect, share learning, and use their voice to influence systems and processes. This will require creative approaches that bring communities and partners together in spaces, whether physical or digital, without barriers to participation so that everyone, including those furthest from power, can contribute towards building forward better.

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