

Blacklands Annual Update 2024

About Blacklands

The community of Blacklands can be found in Kilwinning (North Ayrshire), about a quarter mile south of the town centre. It was developed over time, starting in the 1930s and includes various types of housing, along with a library and primary school. The area has a rich history, previously being part of the Eglinton Iron Works site, with Nethermain Community Centre being a surviving building from that time. Blacklands has a strong sense of community, with people coming together to support one another and create opportunities for connection. From local groups to shared spaces, it's a place where local people are working to make life better for everyone.

Corra's work in Blacklands began in November 2016 and has focussed on building connections, understanding the community's history, and supporting local spaces, services, and people. This has included establishing groups like the Chair-based Exercise Group and parent and toddler groups, as well as facilitating Blacklands Community Kitty - a community-led participatory budgeting process. As Louise, Community Co-ordinator, puts it, "working alongside the community and in partnership with other organisations we will continue to support Blacklands with new ideas, to fulfil current projects and offer support to allow sustainable community activity."

In this update, you'll find stories from the community about what they've been up to in 2024, why community leaders do what they do, and plans for 2025.



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Blacklands timeline

You can delve into the detail of Corra's work alongside Blacklands in each annual update, but here's a taster of what the community has done since 2016. For more information on each year visit www.corra.scot/Blacklands

2016

Work began alongside the community in November 2016. The initial focus was on listening to local people, identifying local strengths and assets and encouraging community-led actions through inclusive engagement.

2017

Corra spent time hosting informal conversations within the community, organising community events and working alongside local groups and organisations to better understand the community.

2018

Engagement within the community continued, work with Blacklands Primary promoting wellbeing, history events that celebrated community heritage and connections formed with families through the Family Fun Night.

2019

Support was provided to the local parent and toddler group in recruiting new committee members, chair-based exercise classes were established and the community started work on designing a participatory budgeting process – Blacklands Community Kitty.

2021

Blacklands Community Kitty distributed over £4000 to five local projects, the Chair-based Exercise Group returned to in-person sessions and the Parent and Toddler Group started back again. The System Changers programme continued to empower participants to explore and address systemic challenges locally.

2020

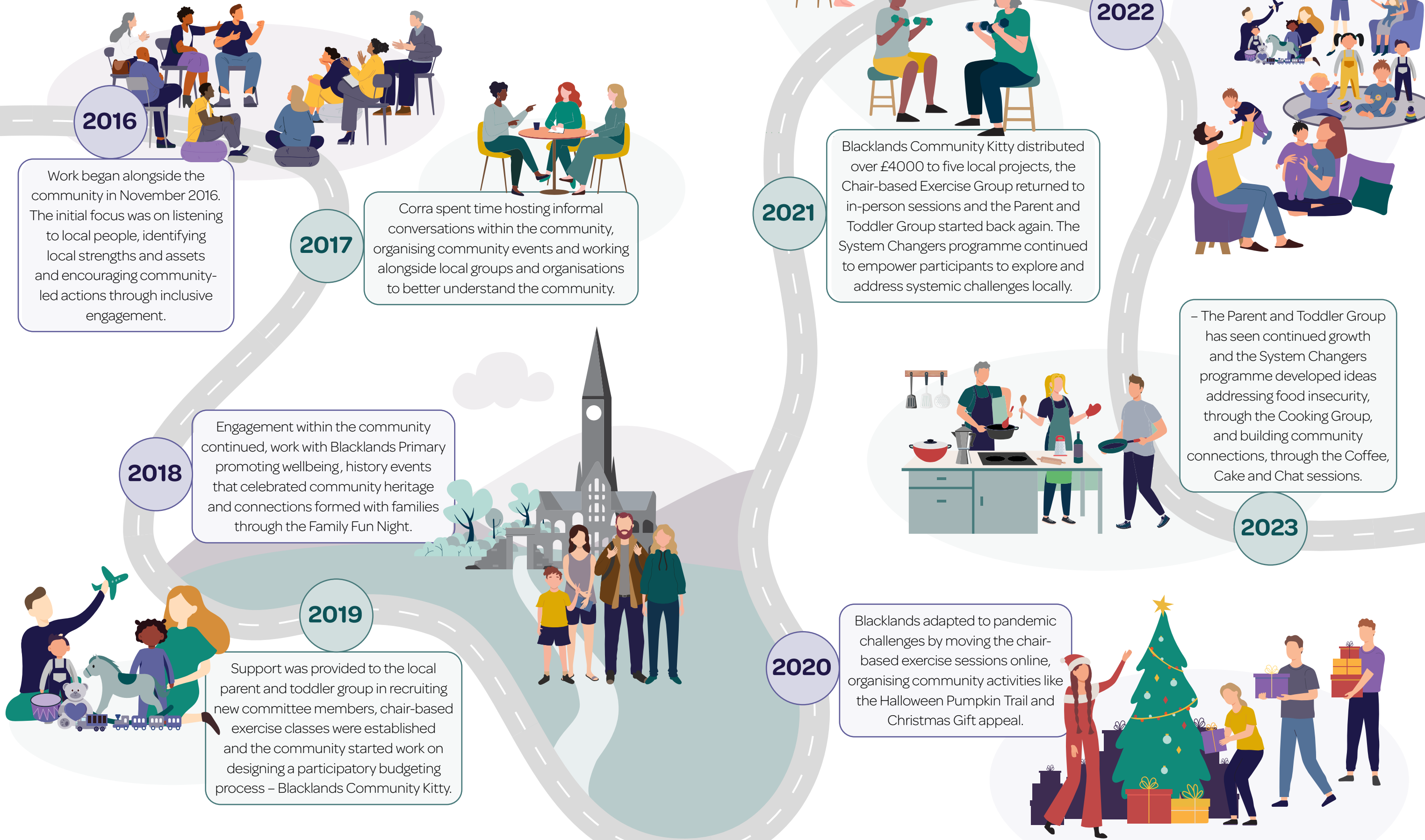
Blacklands adapted to pandemic challenges by moving the chair-based exercise sessions online, organising community activities like the Halloween Pumpkin Trail and Christmas Gift appeal.

2022

Saw significant developments, including the growth of the Parent and Toddler Group to full capacity, ongoing chair-based exercise and the System Changers programme continued to empower participants to address local challenges.

2023

– The Parent and Toddler Group has seen continued growth and the System Changers programme developed ideas addressing food insecurity, through the Cooking Group, and building community connections, through the Coffee, Cake and Chat sessions.



Blacklands big ideas for positive change in 2024

Afternoon Tea Dances: A Celebration of Community Spirit

In 2024, the Afternoon Tea Dance blossomed into a vibrant celebration of community spirit. Inspired by a learning trip to another area, a simple idea from members of the Chair Based Exercise Group and attendees of the Coffee, Cake and Chat evolved into two successful events that brought together people of all ages and backgrounds.

The Afternoon Tea Dances were more than just an afternoon of tea and music; they were proof of the power of connection and teamwork. The events made new relationships with four local sheltered housing complexes, two of which had not previously been involved in community activities. Blacklands Primary School also played a key role, with enthusiastic pupils volunteering to serve food and even encouraging older attendees to join them

on the dance floor. Their energy and kindness bridged generational gaps and brought smiles to everyone's faces, with one attendee commenting, "the kids joining in was great fun."

Organising the Afternoon Tea Dance events was a collaborative effort, with community members stepping up to take on tasks such as selling tickets, sourcing catering, and decorating the venue. While the Community Co-ordinator provided guidance and support, the group took ownership of the project, demonstrating their ability to lead and make decisions collectively. This approach not only empowered participants but also ensured that the Afternoon Tea Dance events reflected the community's needs and aspirations.





Blacklands Primary 🌈 @BL... · 29 Oct
Some of our P7s went along to Nethermains today to serve at the Community Afternoon Tea. They had a ball! @Louise_corra #community



Feedback from attendees highlighted the profound impact of these gatherings. One attendee said, “that has been great, I would have been just sat in the house on my own”. For some, it was their first chance in years to participate in a social event, highlighting how important these activities are for combating isolation and promoting wellbeing.

The success of the Afternoon Tea Dances has laid a strong foundation for future community-led activities. With plans already forming for next year, including exploring new venues across Kilwinning to ensure accessibility for all, the Afternoon Tea Dances are set to continue growing as a valued part of local life. One attendee enjoyed the Tea Dance she came to so much she was asking “are there going to be more?” before it had even finished - demonstrating a desire for these kinds of activities to continue long-term.

The Afternoon Tea Dances show how grassroots ideas can flourish into meaningful community projects when given the right support. It’s a reminder that small acts, like sharing tea and conversation, can create ripples of connection, joy, and belonging throughout a community.



Blacklands

A resilient and sustainable plan, with actions achievable by the community themselves where possible, and supported by community partners where necessary

Partners

North Ayrshire Council
Blacklands Community Association
The Ayrshire Community Trust
North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership

Spaces and Places

Enhance accessibility

Review community spaces to find ways to make them more accessible, and then make those changes

- Increased number of community spaces meeting accessibility standards
- Enhanced parking provision
- Higher frequency of street cleaning services

Improve facilities

Increase parking capacity at library
Implement regular street cleaning to maintain clean public areas

Community Activity

Encourage active lifestyles

Organise regular activities that promote social interaction

- Increased frequency of organised walks and number of participants
- Growth in the number of people engaging in community activity

Increase social connectedness

Host community focussed events and activities that bring people together
Create a newsletter to promote opportunities

Health and Wellbeing

Support health and wellness

Continue the Chair Exercise classes to promote physical activity
Expand the Coffee, Cake and Chat group to provide a welcoming environment

- Higher attendance at Chair Exercise classes
- Increased participation in the Coffee, Cake and Chat group

How we'll work together

Working at the pace of the community is key to moving forward. Having everyone involved on an equal footing, no name badges or job titles, just folk.

Achievements

Parent & Toddler Group
Successfully independent
System Changers Group
Supporting new community-led ideas
Coffee, Cake & Chat
North Ayrshire Council providing space for people to get together

Chair Based Exercise Group
Thriving group with physical activity and social interaction
Blacklands Community Kitty
Distributed £5'000 locally through a Participatory Budgeting process

Get involved

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Plans

Kilwinning Locality Plan
North Ayrshire Local Development Plan

Enhance partnership working across all priority areas
Continue support for new community-led ideas
Continue support for informal community activity and groups



Chair Based Exercise: A Community Connection

The Chair-based Exercise Group in Kilwinning Library has been running since 2018, bringing together a group of women who initially joined for health reasons. Members discovered the group through various channels – word of mouth, social media, or through Louise who connected participants from other local activities and groups.

What started as a fitness initiative has evolved into something much more meaningful. While physical health remains important, the social and emotional benefits have become equally significant. The group has created a network of support, with members forming friendships that extend beyond the weekly sessions.

Participants have found themselves more engaged with community life, attending additional events like afternoon teas and organising social outings together. The group has become a catalyst for increased social participation and confidence.

However, the group faces uncertainty. With the Getting Alongside Communities programme ending by March 2026, there are concerns about maintaining the group's momentum. Continued

access to the library space and a trained instructor are seen as crucial for the group's sustainability. Louise has created a video of the group's routines which the group can follow. The library currently provides the space for free and the use of the projector for the videos to be shown. Originally the group was free to everyone however the group decided to implement a small charge of £1. This ensures that money for supplies such as tea/coffee is available. Surplus funds are currently used to have a group meal out at a local or nearby town restaurant biannually.

This experience demonstrates how a simple health-focussed activity can lead to deeper connections and community engagement. It highlights the importance of support systems in nurturing relationships and building resilience within communities. As they navigate this uncertain future, the women remain committed to preserving the bonds they've created, understanding that true connection is built on shared experiences and mutual support.

System Changers

In 2024, the System Changers group embodied grassroots innovation by blending frontline organisational expertise with community knowledge. After thoughtful transitions in membership – including career advancements for two members who applied system change theories to their new roles – the group welcomed six new members from Police Scotland, North Ayrshire Council, the Health and Social Care Partnership and the NHS. This renewal became a catalyst for effective collaboration.

Two October learning days facilitated by Sam Anderson from Cultivating Potential and Louise helped the group rekindle relationships (or meet the new participants), strengthen connections and build trust. Participants embraced subgroup collaborations to target specific challenges, recognising that “systems change doesn’t have to be changing the whole system”, as one participant noted. It’s more about little shifts that create space for change.

The group also designed and delivered a cooking programme at Cranberry Moss Community Centre, which had a focus on reducing stigma associated with accessing food and was designed to address a community need. Building on their commitment to community-driven solutions, the group also began planning two new projects for the coming year:

- Women’s Wellbeing: Addressing gaps in local support networks
- Women’s DIY: Building practical skills and community connections

These projects arose from conversations in the groups and with community members about their needs and the current availability of services.

The Kilwinning System Changers participants have highlighted several key insights gained through the programme. Participants value the collaborative learning approach and mutual support, describing the group as a source of “valuable self-reflection and lessons from others,” providing “insight, advice, and encouragement”. Participants stress the importance of proactive engagement, urging each other “not to be afraid to speak up” and to “always ask more questions” when navigating complex systems. They also recognise the importance of “taking a step back and looking at the whole picture” to identify leverage points for change. The group also value the significance of lived experience, encouraging each other to embrace their unique perspectives with one participant commenting that “my lived experience is a great benefit to me and who I am”. All of which demonstrate the transformative potential of the System Changers programme in empowering people to become changemakers within their communities.



Where are the opportunities to make positive change?

Scotland's communities need funders, including the public sector, to provide support and resource in ways that work for them. In Blacklands, funding has been used to make a real difference, like organising buses for group trips, implementing the Systems Changers projects and helping cover costs for community events such as the Afternoon Tea Dance. These resources ensure everyone can take part, no matter their circumstances.

Positive change happens when we listen to communities – the people who call Scotland's neighbourhoods home. Louise does this brilliantly in Blacklands in a variety of ways, like by gathering ideas during sessions like the Coffee, Cake and Chat. This approach has led to new projects like the savings club for trips and plans for local events, all shaped by what people actually want and need.

Place-based working centres the knowledge of residents to drive positive changes in their communities. The community of Blacklands is at the heart of projects like System Changers, where they identify local priorities and needs, then create solutions that work for them. This has sparked ideas such as the cooking group, all centred around what matters most to local people.

Neighbourhoods, in all parts of Scotland, should be thoughtfully designed to meet the needs of the people who call them home. In Blacklands, this means making sure venues are accessible and events are inclusive. Whether it's borrowing equipment from different community spaces or involving school children in community activities, the focus is always on making spaces work for everyone.



What next?

From March 2026, our relationship with communities will change. We are supporting community leaders to establish their priorities, plans, and partnerships to sustain community-led change. We will walk alongside community leaders through the Community Leadership Collective ensuring that communities have the skills, connections, and support to take their ideas into action. We will work to ensure that Scotland's communities are supported and resourced in ways that work for them. Throughout 2025, we will support the Blacklands community to realise their plan, with specific actions including:

- Support the delivery of Blacklands Plan on a Page.
- Support community leaders to develop skills and build networks through Corra's Community Leadership Collective.

Support new and existing groups to establish and keep going and develop their ideas.





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