Alcohol & Drugs Partnership

Local Improvement Fund

Impact Report 2022-2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Alcohol & Drugs Partnership

Local Improvement Fund

3. Introduction
4. Funding programmes
5. Breakdown
6. Background
7. Ewen's Room
9. Home-Start Caithness
11. Counselling Care Skye & Lochalsh
12. Lochaber Hope
14. Mikeysline
16. Inverness Bid, Citizens Advice & Cafe 1668
19. ACI Recovery
21. Acknowledgements
22. Distribution

HIGHLAND THIRD SECTOR INTERFACE

Introduction

The Local Improvement Fund (LIF), administered by Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI) in collaboration with the Highland Alcohol & Drugs Partnership (HADP), represents a significant investment in community-led initiatives across the Highlands.

Supported by Scottish Government funding, this empowers organisations to deliver targeted projects, preventing and reducing alcohol and drug-related harm.

Since its inception, we have distributed over £666,500, funding a range of innovative projects that build community resilience, enhance participation in local services, and address multiple disadvantages faced by individuals and families.

MARION MACNEIL
SENIOR DEVELOPMENT OFFICER (Funding)

The LIF is grounded in a vision of "Rights, Respect, Recovery," aligning with national outcomes to reduce substance-related harm, improve access to high-quality treatment and recovery services, and support children, families, and communities affected by substance use. By prioritising proposals shaped by lived experience and requiring evidence of need and impact, the fund ensures that resources are directed where they can make the most meaningful difference.

This report explores the tangible impacts of the Local Improvement Fund in Highland, showcasing how community-driven action, strategic investment, and collaborative partnership are fostering positive change and improving lives across the region.

Funding programmes

The funding in 2022/23 was divided into two grant programmes - one of which was distributed using participatory budgeting (PB). We hosted PB events in Thurso, Invergordon, Kyleakin, Inverness and Fort William.

We invited groups to get creative with their funding pitch and attendees voted at the events. We saw some drama, virtual reality and even a puppet show. A youth football team joined us in Fort William! £5,000 was awarded to 29 projects each.

Grants of up to £50,000 were awarded to five organisations in an open application process in the same year.

Then in 2023/24 we invited online applications again, awarding up to £50,000 to eight organisations.

In 2024/25, we repeated the same process, awarding grants of up to £10,000 to 9 organisations.

Some organisations have been granted funds more than once:

- ACI Recovery
- Apex Highland
- Calman Trust
- Home-Start Caithness
- Merkinch Partnership
- Thurso Community Cafe

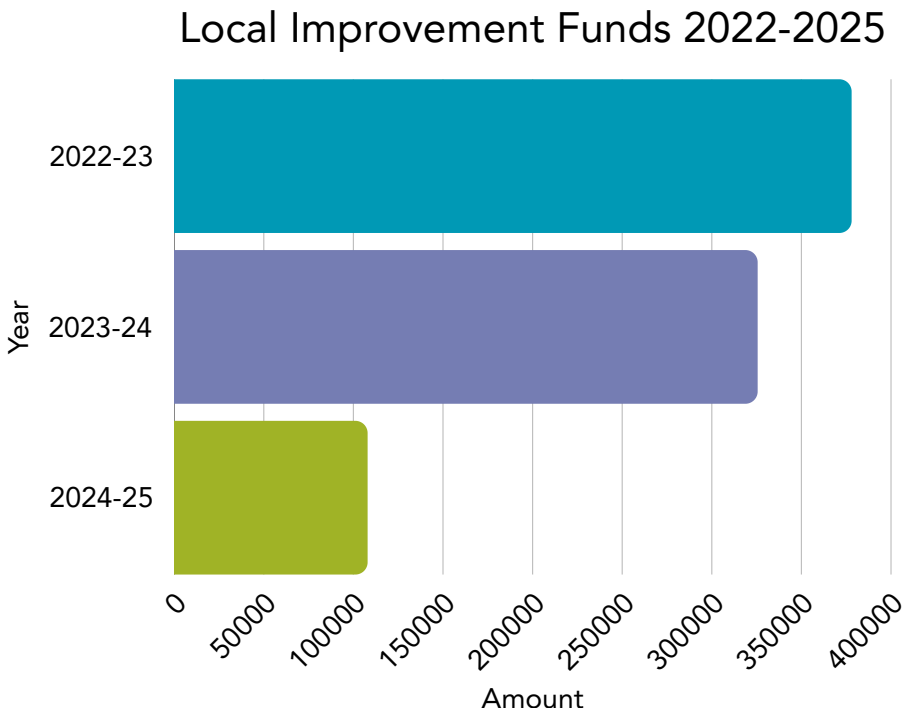
Examples of Funded Activity:

2022: Therapeutic recovery, youth outreach, and mental health support

2023: Participatory action research, peer community development, emotional wellbeing projects in schools.

2024: Creative activities, peer support, family wellness, and community-based recovery.

Breakdown



36
Third Sector Orgs

£666,500
Funding distributed

79
Applications

Key Outcomes:

- Fewer people developing problematic drug and alcohol use.
- Reduced risk for those taking harmful substances.
- Improved access to treatment and recovery services.
- Enhanced quality of life for those facing multiple disadvantages.
- Support for children, families, and communities affected by substance use.

Background

Case Study Information

Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to illustrate the impact of the funding provided, using case studies from organisations who have delivered services funded from the Highland Alcohol & Drugs Partnership, demonstrating accountability, transparency, and value for money. These examples show how targeted investment translates into better outcomes for individuals and communities, and evidence-based learning that can inform future strategies.

Participants

All grant recipients were invited to share details for case studies, although we were aware not everyone would have the time. Thus, the examples included in the report are self-selected. HTSI would like to thank everyone for their contributions. All participants quoted within the case studies are anonymised. HTSI has permission to use the photographs contained within this report.

Data Collection and Photographic Material

Data was collected via proforma and copied into the report. Photos and organisational statistics were reported by grant recipients and were not verified by HTSI.

EWEN'S ROOM

PROMOTING • EDUCATING • CONNECTING

Actively Improving Mental Wellbeing

Ewen's Room offers support to people residing in Lochaber and the adjacent Western Highlands and Islands, who are experiencing difficulty as a result of mental health issues.

Open Doors Arisaig, Mallaig and Kinlochleven

Amount Received - £15,000

What was the funded project?

Our Open Doors sessions are safe spaces where people can come to have conversations, speak about mental health and wellbeing, raise awareness of supporting our own mental health, providing self-regulation techniques and wellbeing activities.

Support has been given to people in extremely challenging circumstances, and the fact that Open Doors is consistent and a regular part of the life of these communities now, means that people commented that they feel more able to open up about their needs and the challenges they are facing in life.

A few examples of the situations people have been facing:

- Suicide bereaved parents
- Someone at immediate risk of suicide
- Loss of a loved one
- Long term illnesses
- Severe mental health conditions impacting significantly on their life
- Dementia and respite for long term carers

Annual cost of delivering the core service? £11,900

Estimated annual cost of fundraising? £500

Number of beneficiaries per year? 356 visits 28 people

Testimonies

Q1: What impact has this project had on your life?

Open Doors has helped me to feel more confident to go into new spaces. Before coming I had stopped going out really, only just to the shop. I guess I'd lost my confidence and felt anxious to be around people. It's been a good place for me to chat to the other people and get a bit more confidence back.

Open Doors in Arisaig is a fantastic resource. It's busy lots of different people dropping in, lots of good conversations and new friendships formed. It's a barrier against loneliness; some people who come here live alone and seek company.

Q2: What impact do you hope your involvement in this project will have in the future?

I hope that I'll get even more confident and able to start to go along to other things. I have been speaking to X about going along to a lunch club with them. I wouldn't have done that without meeting people and building connections at Open Doors first.

I just hope I keep building friendships that lift me up and help me keep going.

Q3: If this project did not exist, what alternative options for help/support would you have?

I would have to travel a long way for any other help/support.

Home-Start Caithness is a voluntary organisation committed to promoting the welfare of families with at least one child under five years of age.

Project Name - Home-Start Caithness

Amount Received - £50,000

What was the funded project?

Home Start Caithness is funded to deliver support to families through the Parents Under Pressure (PuP) program. This program was developed to assist parents and carers facing multiple challenges.

We create individualised, therapeutic family support plans based on theoretical models of child development, attachment, and emotional regulation.

Our ultimate goal is to ensure that children can reach their full potential and that parents and carers can provide a nurturing family environment to support this goal.

Family Support Worker (FSW) has been brilliant. She's always supportive & takes things at my speed but also gives me a nudge when needed.

Support has been fantastic, we have open communication to work out what works & what doesn't & I know you are at the end of the phone when I need you.

You're amazing & have supported our family since we first met you. You're so understanding & supportive to our needs & I can't imagine you not being part of our little family now.

Q&A

What is the annual cost of delivering the core service? £52,000

What's your estimated annual cost of fundraising? £3,000

How many beneficiaries per year do you have? 28

Testimonies

Q1: What impact has this project had on your life?

Really Positive

I was able to leave the house after months of being too afraid and worried what might happen.

With help I was able to attend appointments and take my child swimming

Having support helped me connect with my family and child but also gave me strategies to manage the pressures of parenting and substance misuse.

Q2: What impact do you hope your involvement in this project will have in the future?

I feel much more positive and heard.

My FSW has given me the confidence to say how I feel and also ways to cope when I feel stressed and overwhelmed

I know when I am struggling and know my FSW will be there to help and listen.

Q3: If this project did not exist, what alternative options for help/support would you have?

Struggled to find any suitable support that works for me – home start have been a massive help.

Counselling Care Skye & Lochalsh offers an opportunity for people to talk in confidence with someone outside their situation – gaining perspective and insight.

Project Name - Trauma Counselling

Amount Received - £5,000

What was the funded project?

Trauma counselling for people affected by alcohol or drug related harm. The counselling is for people living with addiction and family members affected in the Skye & Lochalsh area.

Significant Achievements

We delivered professional counselling sessions to people affected by alcohol and drugs. All clients who completed counselling showed significant improvement in their mental health and wellbeing, increased functioning and reduced risk (measured using CORE-OM tool).

Testimony

What impact has this project had on your life? If positive, tell us how?

Very, very positive. I seriously don't know how things would have progressed without it. My counsellor has changed things so much for me. I was very sceptical beforehand. I now feel like I have the tools to cope when things go wrong, I feel like I will cope now.

Q&A

What is the annual cost of delivering the core service? £125,000

What's your estimated annual cost of fundraising? £7,000

How many beneficiaries per year do you have? 150

Lochaber Hope is a registered charity in Fort William, offering mental health support and personal development opportunities to everyone in Lochaber.

Project Name - Lochaber Hope

Amount Received - £5,000

What was the funded project?

To reach people who are at risk or at risk of being at risk.

The project has developed and brought its own challenges, we have worked through these challenges, to consistently bring a stronger and more direct plan and have been able to steer the project to seek more funding, specifically for much needed drug and alcohol prevention, support and recovery.

Our aim was to set up groups to be attractive to people and then build relationships with them and learn whatever other provisions they needed in their lives. This was successful in those who were isolated, lonely, stuck, low-confidence, depressed, with anxiety and other mental health conditions.

But for drug and alcohol problems, we found it really hard to engage. We have struggled with SMART recovery attendance, our families affected by addictions has been well received and we are starting another group. But actually, getting the majority of people pre-recovery has been hard.

To make provision for those who are vulnerable has been successful and is continuing to develop with support and activity groups, both within New Connections and in collaboration with organisations and business outwith Lochaber Hope, pulling resources in activity content, materials and staffing.

Q&A

What is the annual cost of delivering the core service? £260,000

What's your estimated annual cost of fundraising? £3,876

How many beneficiaries per year do you have? 248

Testimonies

Q1: What impact has this project had on your life? If positive, can you tell us how?

The Autistic Womens Group is the first time in my life I have been able to be myself.

I had support from a mentor and a counsellor, Lochaber Hope helped me believe I deserved better they helped me to see what my life could be like.

Going to the Food - Soups-Up initiative every week, I have made good friends, friends for life!

Q2: What impact do you hope your involvement in this project will have in the future?

I have been involved in the refurbishment of New Connections. I am working towards being a co facilitator

I will be able to speak about my experience and support encourage other women to make supported choices over abuse.

Lochaber Hope helped me believe I deserved better!

I lost 5 stone in weight as my confidence grew and I love my life!

My involvement has built my confidence and belief in myself, I have travelled, I volunteer at LH and am about to take a paid post at the Lochaber Museum.
I can see a bright future.

Q3: If this project did not exist, what alternative options for help/support would you have?

None

Lochaber Hope walked the walk with me.

Mikeysline
IT'S OK NOT TO BE OK

At Mikeysline, suicide prevention and mental health awareness work is at the core of what they do - to break down the stigma associated with seeking support for emotional distress.

Project Name - Alcohol Brief Interventions

Amount Received - £5,000

What was the funded project?

Training and resources provided over a series of sessions to upskill more Mikeysline staff and volunteers in the ABI process. As a result 18 staff and volunteers are able to put their increased knowledge and understanding into practice in their daily work.

Significant Achievements

18 staff and volunteers were trained alongside managers of services also benefitting from this opportunity to enhance their knowledge. The support staff/volunteers and are now more knowledgeable and better equipped to support service users with understanding how their use of alcohol may impact their wellbeing, including their mental health.

Improved understanding by staff and volunteers of the ABI process and how to make this person centred for the service users being supported.

Improved awareness overall by all staff and volunteers of the impact of alcohol on the mental health of the people we are supporting through additional discussions around this topic and sharing of information and additional resources.

Increase in numbers of service users supported through the ABI process going forward.

Testimonies

Q2: What impact do you hope your involvement in this project will have in the future?

I feel I got a lot from the training and have gained skills and tools which will help me talk to people about alcohol more openly and with more confidence.

I am now much more aware of the impact on young people and girls and women in particular, who can be affected by others drinking in their environment, as well as their own use of alcohol.

I feel more confident talking about alcohol use with the service users I am supporting.

Since my training, I have had much more open and productive discussions with service users I am supporting, about their use of alcohol and the impact it is having on their overall mental health.

Q&A

What is the annual cost of delivering the core service?

£646,146

What's your estimated annual cost of fundraising?

£94,000

How many beneficiaries per year do you have?

5,000 direct support and 12,000 through workshops etc.

Project Name - Warmth & Wellness Matters

Amount Received - £9,995

This project evolved from previous funding provided to Inverness BID to support at-risk individuals who, for a number of related reasons, may not reliably engage with traditional services.

In partnership with Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Café 1668, and other local agencies, the project addresses critical issues of food insecurity and fuel poverty, focusing on those at risk of drug or alcohol-related harm.

Earlier funding through the Safe Inverness Project identified a rising need for immediate practical support, especially as incidents of shoplifting for example, were increasingly reported as being for essential items like food and sanitary products.

Often those who may be at risk or suffering from drug or alcohol related harm being involved in these types of incidents, is indicative of wider complex vulnerabilities and challenges.

Building on success from the pilot, which helped stock food and toiletries at Café 1668, providing critical access to essentials and warmth, key personnel were naloxone and first aid trained.

It was with this background that the Inverness Warmth and Wellness Project was established. The project running in February and March 2025 aimed to reduce isolation and improve access to essential services.

The project offers nutritious meals, specialist home energy advice, and follow-up casework delivered by the team at CAB within the setting of Café 1668, thus facilitating engagement for individuals who would otherwise struggle to access traditional support.

This integrated approach empowers individuals to address their immediate needs and take control of their broader challenges, helping to reduce their financial and emotional stress, ultimately supporting their journey towards recovery and improving overall wellbeing.

Project Partners were able to establish the project design quickly, with Inverness BID providing the marketing and awareness raising, Café 1668 providing the venue, larder and other essentials and the bureau giving holistic advice and support.

It was important that beneficiaries felt welcome and encouraged to take control of their circumstances.
Going forward, it is anticipated that demand will again be at peak during the colder months.

Outcomes - Impact Achieved

Increased Confidence & Self-Sufficiency -
Clients reported feeling more empowered to manage their energy costs and access available support.

Reduction in Social Isolation & Loneliness -
Many individuals who initially attended for support have since returned to Café 1668, integrating into a community space where they feel welcomed and valued. Social support is another crucial element in helping beneficiaries to have the right context within which to continue a recovery journey.

Improved Access to Essential Services -
By embedding holistic support services within a familiar setting, individuals who might otherwise avoid traditional institutions engaged more readily.

Strengthened Community Networks & Partnerships -
The project reinforced the importance of collaboration between BID, CAB, Café 1668, and other agencies, creating a sustainable model for supporting vulnerable individuals.

A Strong Foundation for Future Expansion -
Despite being launched at short notice, the project has proven its value, demonstrating a clear need for continued support. Feedback suggests that an earlier launch in September/October would allow for greater reach and impact ahead of peak winter demand.

ACI's award winning organisation is a collective of person-centred counsellors and dedicated recovery coaches, committed to delivering empowerment and restoration programs for individuals grappling with addiction.

Project Name - various projects

Amount Received - £70,000 (March 2022 to May 2024)

Significant Achievements

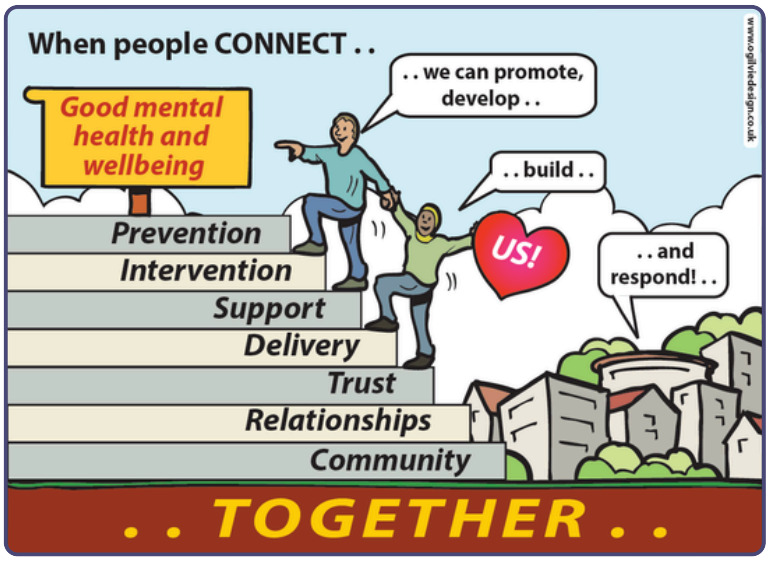
- 216 Polish speaking, person centred Talking Therapy sessions
- 235 Young People, person centred Talking Therapy sessions
- Fortnightly Music Group - 52 sessions
- Fortnightly Creative Writing Group – 64 sessions
- CRAFT 6-week Family Training Programme (28 participants - 6 cohorts)
- Healing Hooves Training, Sue Macleod, Jul 23 & Sept 23
- Somatic Movement Workshops Nov '22 & July '23 (12 volunteers)
- Counsellors Breathing for Wellness Workshop Nov '22 (15 volunteers)
- Coaching for Counsellors Training - Rowan Consultancy (10 volunteers)
- SACC Counselling People through Alcohol Change Course Mar '23
- CRAFT Training – SFAD 22/23
- Commenced at Invergordon Leisure Centre Mar '23 – Jun '23,
- Moved into Morrich House Jun '23 – Present
- 5-day Recovery Coach Training, RCA Lived Experience Cohort (2023)

Testimonies

If this project did not exist, what alternative options for help/support would you have?

With thanks

We would like to thank the Highland Alcohol & Drugs Partnership, for this investment in community groups, enabling them to demonstrate the benefit this funding can have, for people who trust and value the support available in their local area.



We're also grateful to representatives from the Criminal Justice Partnership, Police Scotland, HADP and Drug & Alcohol Recovery Service for their involvement in funding panels.

We appreciate the progress made possible by high levels of commitment, endurance and dedication from a variety of community groups, working together with their communities, to build relationships and develop support options, such as:

- Early intervention programmes for families
- Targeted local supports for individuals and groups
- Peer-led and lived-experience-informed service design
- Community forums for sharing learning and celebrating achievements

Lived Experience

Many funded organisations are led by or involve people with lived experience of substance use. Lived experience is a criterion for funding and we are grateful to have this valuable experience represented in our funding panels.

Groups funded 2022-2025

Large Grants 2022

ACI Recovery
Apex Highland
Calman Trust
Centred
Merkinch Partnership

Small Grants 2023

Aberlour Childcare Trust
ACI Recovery
Albyn Housing
Apex Highland
Caithness Drug&Alcohol Forum
Counselling Care Skye & Lochalsh
Darach Social Croft Ltd
Ewen's Room
Highlife Highland
Highland Homeless Trust
Inspiring Young Voices
Inverness City Centre BID
Living Hope Skye & Lochalsh
Lochaber Hope
Lochalsh Youth Community Trust
Mikeysline
Ormlie Community Association
Safe Strong & Free
SNAP (Special Needs Action)
The Place Youth Club
Thurso Community Café

Large Grants 2023

Caithness MH Support Group
Families Outside
Home-Start Caithness
Home-Start East Highland
Kyle & Lochalsh Community Trust
Progress in Dialogue
RASASH
Safe Strong & Free

Large Grants 2024

Calman Trust
Flip of the Coin CIC
Home-Start Caithness
Lochaber Hope
MECOPP
Merkinch Partnership
Skye & Lochalsh MH Association
Thurso Community Café
Inverness City Centre BID
Highland WellNess Collective
New Start Highland

2025 and beyond

At the time of publishing this report, we have received applications to fund activity in 2026-27. Decisions to be made in January 2026.