



HIGHLAND  
THIRD  
SECTOR  
INTERFACE

# Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund for Adults Year Five

Closing Report  
June 2026



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot



Highland  
Community  
Planning  
Partnership

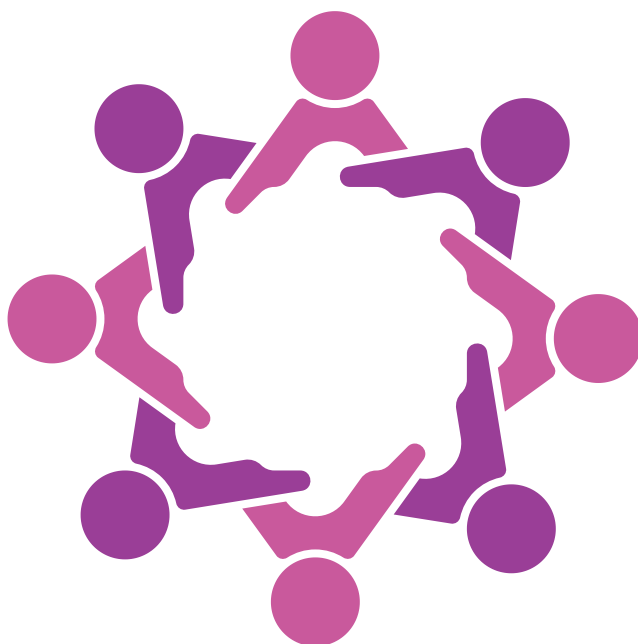


HIGHLAND  
THIRD  
SECTOR  
INTERFACE

The Highland Third Sector Interface is a Scottish Registered Charity, SC043521  
and a Scottish Registered Company SC425808

# Contents

Introduction	3
Summary of local approach and priorities	4-5
Support for applicants	5
Amendments for Year 5	6
Demand for the fund	7
Funded areas	8
Funded activity	9
Funding process & impact	10
What worked well	11
The challenges	11
Organisations awarded grants	12-13
Key lessons & acknowledgements	14





# Introduction

Since 2021, The Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for Adults has invested £66 million across Scotland, to help the third sector tackle social isolation, loneliness and mental health inequalities made worse by the ongoing pandemic and cost-of-living crisis.

In April 2025, funding for a fifth and sixth year was announced, with over £700,000 per year allocated to Highland TSI. The opportunity to grant funding across two years arose as part of the Scottish Government's Fairer Funding pilot. We were delighted to have the opportunity to allow for longer-term planning, improving stability for organisations and community services. We also had some flexibility to award a mix of both one and two-year grants. This report describes how the fund was invested over 2025/2026.

In Highland, 331 separate grants have been awarded to 304 organisations so far, with a total investment exceeding £3,939,500.

*“Since the fund was established, we have invested £66 million, reaching a variety of groups supporting those at increased risk of poor mental health and wellbeing – including people facing socio-economic disadvantage, older people and ethnic minority communities. I look forward to seeing the positive impact that this further £30 million investment will make to the wellbeing of people and communities across Scotland”,  
Mental Wellbeing Minister Maree Todd.*





In Highland, the local fund priorities and assessment are undertaken in collaboration with the Community Planning Partnership. **The independent funding panel** included representatives from the CPP’s Mental Health Delivery Group & Whole Family Wellbeing Programme, Highlands & Islands Enterprise and members of Third Sector Organisations (TSOs), who all gave considerable time to determine best value from the proposals received.

We introduced four separate funding programmes to offer flexible options that reflect a wide range of needs within the sector. The majority of grant opportunities were open for application or expressions of interest, with specific themes identified for the Intensive Capacity Building Grants.

- Micro Grants - open 4 July - 5 August - 12 grants awarded in August
- Small Grants - open 4 July - 14 August - 12 grants awarded in September
- Collab Grants - EOI open 29 August - 30 September - 9 grants awarded in January
- Intensive capacity building - open 29 September - 11 November - 4 grants awarded

The collaborative grants, introduced in 2024, have generated creative partnerships, proving beneficial for organisations and participants alike. Therefore, we allocated 41% of the funds for collaborative work again, to be delivered across two years from 2025/6-2027/8. The final stage of the collaborative application process provided two months for selected applicants to prepare a proposal document and present to the funding panel in-person.

# Intensive Capacity Building Themes

## Theme One:

Support for birth parents whose children have been permanently removed, with parental rights terminated.

Support focus: Bereavement, peer support, and trauma-informed

## Theme Two:

Older adults experiencing the impact of digital isolation

Support focus: Initiatives that reduce digital isolation and increase social connectivity

## Theme Three:

Support for adults currently undiagnosed awaiting ADHD Assessment

Support focus: Pre-diagnostic support, peer networks and interventions to reduce distress and build understanding during the waiting period.

## Theme Four:

Recovery and wellbeing activities for Veterans living in Highland

Support focus: A range of activities promoting recovery, good mental health, and overall wellbeing

One grant per theme was on offer; when applications were received they all focused on themes 2,3 or 4 so two grants were awarded for digital isolation.

## Added Investment

Due to the availability of two-year funding, demand far exceeded our resources, leaving many strong applications denied funding. We are therefore very grateful to the **Scottish Government** for providing an additional £3 million investment across Scotland, which translated to £143,000 for Highland groups. However, this could only be for one-year spend so we invited previously denied applicants to modify their proposals for single-year grants of up to £20,000. This resulted in ten more grants being awarded in January 2026.

## Support for applicants

We offer individual support with proposals as required, and provide numerous opportunities to access guidance and support, including online briefings, discussion groups, guidance documents and FAQs. The application portal is available via our website, where applicants can also download case studies, closing reports from previous years and a sample application form.

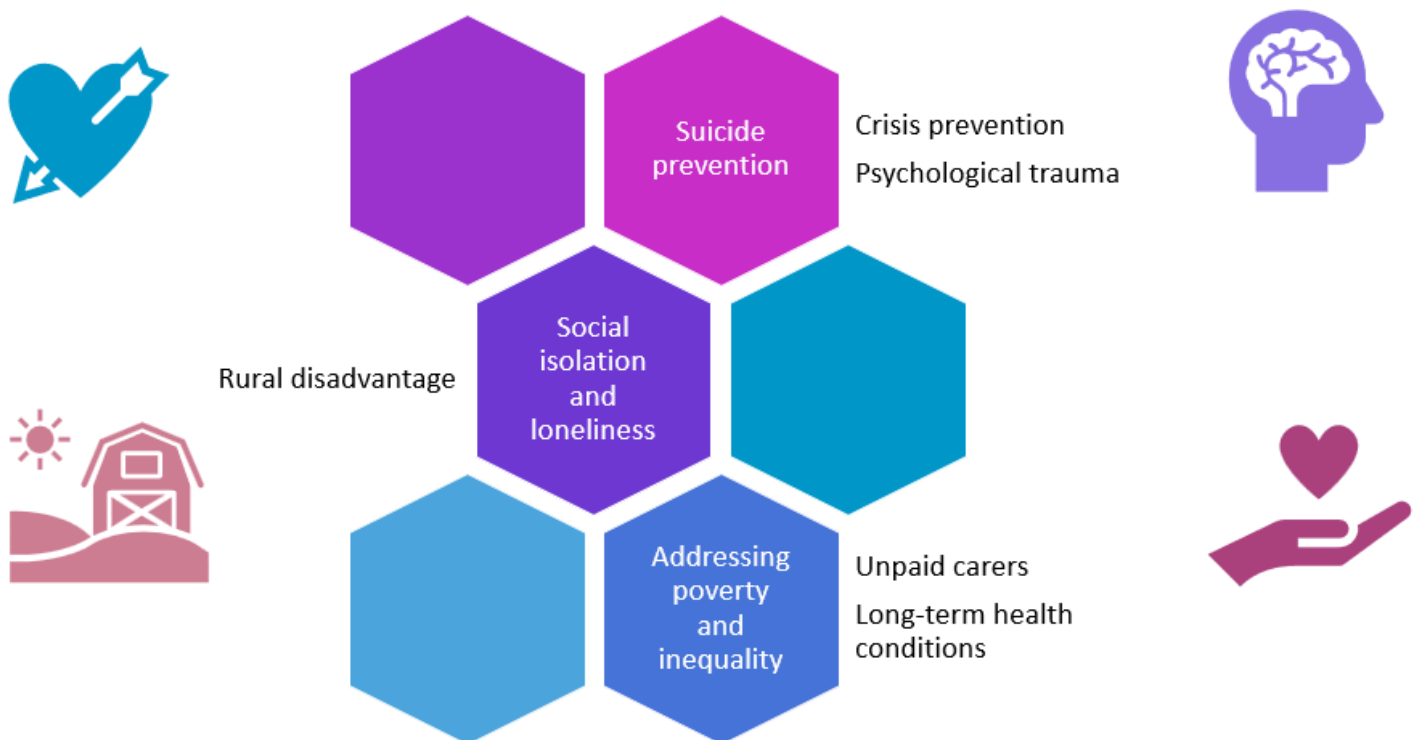
# TSI Partners

- [Caithness Voluntary Group \(CVG\)](#)
- [Voluntary Groups Sutherland \(VGS\)](#)
- [Skye Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations \(SLCVO\)](#)
- [Voluntary Action Lochaber \(VAL\)](#)
- [Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey \(VABS\)](#)

Our TSI Partners promote the fund within their localities, as well as supporting their members with enquiries about the fund. This includes our Inner Moray Firth & Wester Ross team.

## Amendments

The two-year funding opportunity led to additional guidance from Scottish Government, so there were some amendments to the eligibility criteria, but the overall aims of the fund remained the same.



While national charities and those with annual turnover equal to/above £1 million were not prohibited from applying, they would only be awarded a grant by exception.

Unincorporated Associations (UAs) were not eligible to apply for a grant, but they could collaborate with another organisation with the legal structure to enter into agreements. In such a scenario, the lead applicant had to be incorporated, and the UA would deliver the project in partnership.

# Demand for the fund



**£3,407,656**

Amount requested

**147**

Applications

**£851,520**

Funds granted

**47**

Grants awarded

**490**

Volunteers

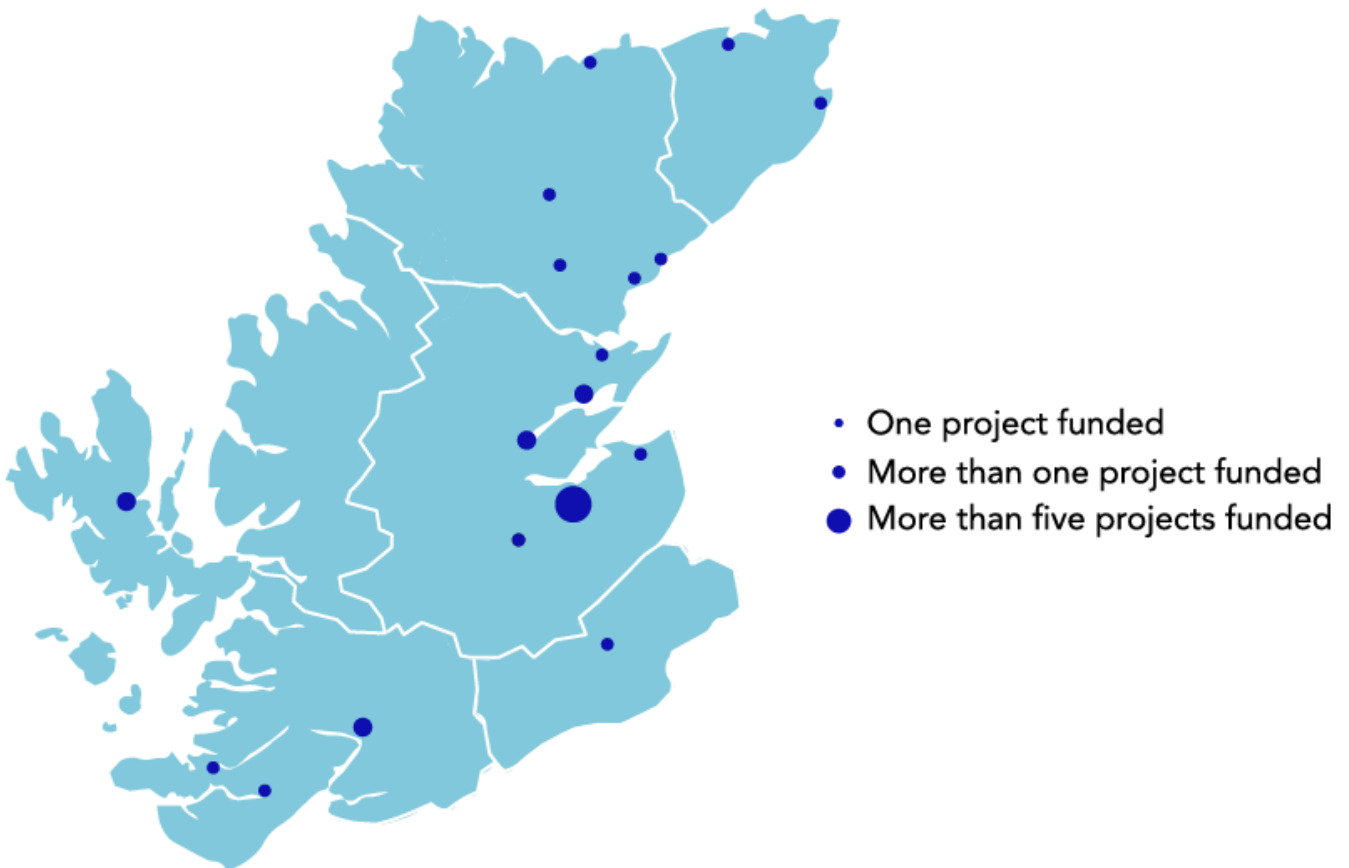
<b>Micro Grants</b>	<b>£100,000</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>Small Grants</b>	<b>£176,575</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Collab Grants</b>	<b>£350,570</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>Capacity Grants</b>	<b>£70,883</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Added Investment</b>	<b>£153,492</b>	<b>18%</b>

As with previous years, the identified need and capability of the sector far exceeded the level of investment available. Perhaps the multi-year funding opportunity was more popular than anticipated. Nevertheless, third sector activity around mental health support is growing, but more strategic, targeted investment and continued collaboration between community-led services could potentially lead to better outcomes and value on investment in the long-term.

We asked applicants about the number of volunteers potentially involved in the project. Of the successful applicants, they predicted 490 volunteers.

# Funded Areas

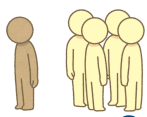
Badenoch & Strathspey	2	£21,324	Inner Moray Firth	14	£328,421
Caithness	3	£47,082	Lochaber	5	£55,370
Highland-wide	12	£187,656	Skye & Lochalsh	4	£93,809
Sutherland	7	£117,858	Total	47	£851,520



- Highland-wide includes projects targeting specific groups with activities that may cover more than one locality in the region
- There were no applications received for projects in Wester Ross
- The organisations awarded grants are listed on page 12 & 13

# Funded activity

## National Priorities



46

Social isolation & loneliness



22

Suicide prevention



30

Poverty & inequality



52%

Open to all but targeted to specific groups



30%

Restricted to specific groups in need



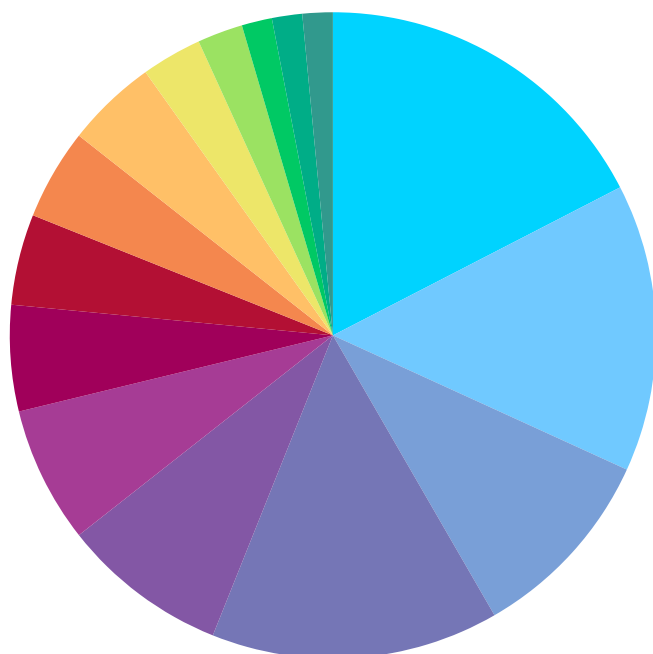
18%

General population in a specific locality

Applicants targeted a wide range of 'at risk' groups but a higher portion of applicants were concerned with geographic and/or socio-economic disadvantage, people living with long-term health conditions and unpaid carers.

## Targeted Support:

- People disadvantaged by geography
- People with LTCs/Disability
- Socio-economic disadvantage
- Unpaid Carers
- Severe and multiple disadvantage
- Affected by psychological trauma
- Neurological conditions/learning dis...
- People with diagnosed mental illness
- Older people (50+)
- Young people (16-24)
- Women (gender-based violence)
- People experiencing bereavement or...
- Refugees/no recourse to public funds
- People from a minority ethnic backgr...
- LGBTI+



# Funding process

Applicants are asked to select the locality in which the activity will be mainly focused. So, the geographic area of investment does not necessarily reflect where the funded organisation is based.

The overall funding allocation is based on merit - how well each application demonstrates that they satisfy the required criteria. Investment is not allocated by locality but if necessary, the independent panel may choose to take localities into account when assessing applications of equal merit.

The fund is aimed at small-scale grassroots activity that meets identified needs of a (thematic or geographic) community - therefore 'Highland-wide' is either:


- aimed at a distinct thematic group spread throughout the region,
- focused on more than one locality within the region, or
- occasionally both of the above.



62%

Over £526,000 (62%) was invested in multi-year funding.

49% of the fund was awarded for new projects



49%



25%

A quarter of the proposed activity was awarded funding

## Reporting on impact

Funded projects must submit a midway **Progress Report** (every six months for two-year projects) to review budget, timeline and progress towards the intended outcomes.

When the grant funding has been spent, grantees must submit a **Closing Report**, demonstrating how the outcomes were achieved and how this was measured, the number of unique beneficiaries, and any lessons learned/things they might do differently.

At the end of April 2026 HTSI shared data on the funding distribution with the Scottish Government and in 2027, HTSI will share Impact Case Studies, selected from projects which have already submitted closing reports.

# What worked well

With the additional two-year funding opportunity, we were able to offer a broader range of options to suit different organisations, and the application dates were arranged between July and November of 2025.

Opening the micro grants and small grants together on 4 July, with different closing dates, allowed extra time to apply for two-year funding.



We then opened the collaborative EoI portal end of August, which allowed capacity within the team to carry out basic eligibility checks before applications were shared with panel members. The Capacity Building application portal opened in the Autumn and finally, we invited applicants to review previous submissions in November for the Added Investment. Thus, not too much overlap.

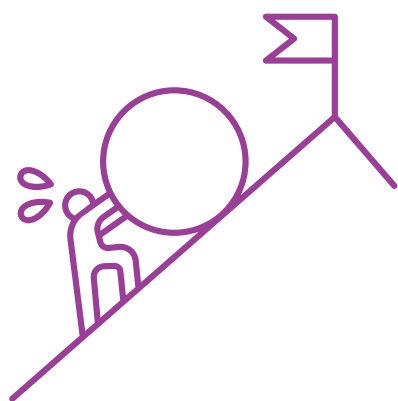
We use a scoring matrix to assess applications against each criterion, thus providing independent panel members an equitable way to assess how well applicants have demonstrated that they meet the criteria. We then calculate the average score per application, which is used to prompt in-depth discussion before a consensus can be reached.

The capacity building grant programme identified organisations with the relevant expertise, to address mental health and wellbeing for specific groups identified as having unmet needs.

## Challenges

Our main challenge was the overwhelming demand for 2-year small grants, which lowered the average success rate from 50 - 20%. Thanks to the added investment, we were able to award ten more grants of up to £20,000.

We commonly see applications which don't reflect the questions asked, or lack specificity when describing activities and outputs. We continue to see planned activities added instead of outcomes, indicating that the guidance was not utilised or understood. As a result, we can see groups in need of funding, yet they are missing out on valuable investment.



# Grants paid 2025/26

<b><u>MICRO GRANTS - ONE YEAR</u></b>	
Acharacle Community Company	£8,460
Befrienders Highland	£9,780
Blooming Gardeners	£8,000
Caithness and Sutherland Women's Aid	£10,000
Cruse Scotland	£3,530
Go Golspie Development Trust	£10,000
Highland Yoga Collective CIC	£5,680
Inspiring Young Voices	£10,000
Inverness Womens Aid	£7,680
Lochaber Hope	£10,000
Partnerships for Wellbeing	£10,000
Voluntary Action Lochaber	£6,870
<b><u>SMALL GRANTS - TWO YEARS</u></b>	
Caithness and Sutherland Women's Aid	£20,000
Calman Trust	£19,560
Compass Collective	£7,115
Engaging With Activity CIC	£10,614
Finding Your Feet	£8,232
Lochview Rural Training Centre	£18,620
Mhor Outdoor Ltd	£11,024
North Sutherland Community Forestry Trust	£9,456
Roots and Shoots Highland CIC	£15,644
Ross-Shire Women's Aid	£19,600
Skye & Lochalsh Mental Health Association	£20,000
Urram SCIO	£16,710



# Grants paid 2025/26 (continued)

<b><u>ADDED INVESTMENT - ONE YEAR</u></b>		
Apex Scotland		£20,000
Counselling Care Skye & Lochalsh		£20,000
CVG (Befriending Caithness)		£17,302
Highland Mindfulness Group		£6,100
Inverness Foodstuff		£15,000
LEAP Sports Scotland		£15,500
MECOPP (Minority Ethnic Carers & Older People)		£20,000
Reach4Reality		£6,260
Relationship Scotland		£20,000
Voluntary Action Lochaber		£13,330
<b><u>COLLABORATIVE GRANTS (Lead Applicants)</u></b>		
ACI Recovery Services		£48,480
Creativity in Care (SMHAFH)		£30,600
Fèis Rois		£43,065
For You Training (Farmer Jones Academy CIC)		£47,007
Inverness Foodstuff		£35,000
Inverness Openarts		£38,984
Lochview Rural Training		£48,225
New Start Highland		£25,000
Skye & Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Orgs.		£34,209
<b><u>CAPACITY BUILDING - ONE YEAR</u></b>		
Fares4Free (Vector24)		£20,000
Highland Well-Ness Collective		£19,940
Lairg and District Learning Centre		£10,943
Red Chair Highland CIC		£20,000
<b><u>TOTAL INVESTMENT YEAR FIVE</u></b>		<b><u>£851,520</u></b>



All figures included are for one year, even if the grant is awarded for two years. Subsequent installments are subject to certain conditions and will therefore be reported on in the following financial year.

# Key Lessons



Existing partnerships work well to help identify gaps in local provision and bring a wealth of knowledge to the decision-making.



Ongoing engagement with the sector helps us to reach relevant groups, address unmet needs, and improves the overall process.



Extended time offers fair funding practice, enabling collaborative proposals to develop from original EoI into the final proposal.

## Contact:

[funding@highlandtsi.org.uk](mailto:funding@highlandtsi.org.uk)

07826 821 545

## Acknowledgements

Caithness Voluntary Groups  
Highland & Islands Enterprise  
Highland Community Planning Partnership  
Highland Whole Family Wellbeing Programme  
Skye & Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Orgs.  
The Scottish Government  
Voluntary Action Badenoch & Strathspey  
Voluntary Action Lochaber  
Voluntary Groups Sutherland



The Highland Third Sector Interface is a Scottish Registered Charity, SC043521  
and a Scottish Registered Company SC425808