

Big Picture Thinking Seminar Series

Full
Programme
2026-2027



[Register now on Eventbrite](#)



Living
Well

ARGYLL & BUTE

Big Picture Thinking Seminar Series

2026-2027

Table of Contents

- 1 Programme Overview**
About the seminar series
- 2 Downstream Drift: What if 'health' is part of the problem?**
10 September 2026 | 2-4pm
- 3 Making Better Places to Live Well**
22 October 2026 | 10am-12pm
- 4 Understanding Place**
12 November 2026 | 2-4pm
- 5 Collaborating With Communities**
10 December 2026 | 10am-12pm
- 6 Why Mattering Matters**
28 January 2027 | 10am-12pm
- 7 Connection, Identity & Belonging**
11 February 2027 | 2-4pm
- 8 Deliberative Democracy: Are We Smarter Together?**
18 March 2027 | 2-4pm
- 9 Deliberative Democracy as a Practice of Change**
22 April 2027 | 2-4pm
- 10 Reimagining the Role of Communities in Public Life**
13 May 2027 | 2-4pm
- 11 Changing The Rules Of The Economy To Deliver Good Lives**
10 June 2027 | 10-12pm



Free to attend. All welcome.

CommunitiesWorkingTogether@argylltsi.org.uk

[Register now on Eventbrite](#)



**Living
Well**

ARGYLL & BUTE

The Big Picture Thinking Seminar Series

2026-
2027

The Big Picture Thinking Seminar Series is part of Communities Working Together, a workstream of the Living Well Board for Argyll and Bute. Communities Working Together is a partnership bringing organisations and communities together — including the TSI, NHS Highland/HSCP, Macmillan and LiveArgyll — around a shared commitment to shift how we work together to support and enable people to live a good life.

These online sessions connect people across Argyll and Bute with inspiring international speakers to explore practical approaches and spark fresh thinking. Threads running through the series include people, place, identity, social capital, and democracy — and how these connect to the conditions that allow communities to shape their own futures. Each session is part of a growing conversation about how we support people to live well: not just through services, but through belonging, connection, and the things that help communities thrive.

Sessions are open to everyone with an interest in community wellbeing — whether you work in health, the third sector, local government, or simply care about where you live. Free to attend. All welcome.



[Register now on Eventbrite](#)



Living
Well

ARGYLL & BUTE



Big Picture Thinking Seminar Series

2026-2027

Thursday 10 September
2026 | 2-4pm

Downstream Drift: What if 'health' is part of the problem?

About this session

'Prevention is better than cure': we all know it's true, so why can't we act on it? Successive governments talk about acting to prevent ill-health, but are not able to do so. It isn't because they don't know how to do it: policy strategies often articulate well the causes of poor health across the population. But then a 'drift' occurs: these impressive diagnoses of the problem are followed by wholly inadequate solutions. If poverty is a root cause, then how do anti-depressants help? If unemployment is a root cause, how can dieting revive a local economy?

Ally is writing a book on this right now and this seminar is designed so that attendees can help! The book builds on the work of Julia Lynch, who argued that the term 'health inequality' medicalises social inequality (it turns social inequality into a medical issue). The book will describe how the term 'health' medicalises policy via five specific mechanisms. But if this is the case, what can be done about it? We can't wave a magic word wand to stop saying 'health' or to transform its meaning. In this seminar, Ally will first present and discuss the arguments of the book, and then work with all attendees to explore different ways we might limit or avoid these unhelpful medicalising mechanisms.

About the speaker

Dr Ally Brown completed his PhD in policy approaches to health inequality in 2025. Supervised by Professor Kat Smith, the thesis explored how social, economic and health policymakers in the Scottish Government and Greater Manchester Combined Authority conceptualised 'health', 'inequalities' and 'health inequalities' in the context of broader 'inclusive growth' and 'wellbeing economy' agendas. Ally also worked for a year with the Scottish Government, PHS and COSLA on a programme to develop a more preventive policy approach to mental health. Ally is currently a Research Associate at the University of Strathclyde.



Free to attend. All
welcome.
Scan QR code for more
details

CommunitiesWorkingTogether
@argylltsi.org.uk



Living
Well

ARGYLL & BUTE

[Register now on Eventbrite](#)



Big Picture Thinking Seminar Series

2026-2027

Thursday 29 October 2026

10-12pm

Making Better Places to Live Well: Collaborative Approaches to Place

About this session

What makes a place somewhere people can live well? And how do we work together — across sectors, communities and disciplines — to shape places that support wellbeing locally?

In this session, Diarmaid will draw on more than twenty years of work across the UK and Europe to explore collaborative approaches to place. He will look at what it takes to make better places to live well locally, why collaboration across sectors is central to that work, and what design and place-based thinking can contribute to how we plan services, support communities, and respond to local need.

The session will offer both practical examples and space for reflection on how these approaches connect to the work happening across Argyll and Bute.

About the speaker

Diarmaid is an Associate Director at Scottish Futures Trust. He is a designer, educator, and communicator. With a multidisciplinary background, and over 20 years' experience working across sectors in the UK and Europe, Diarmaid champions collaborative approaches to making better places to live well locally.



Free to attend. All welcome.
Scan QR code for more details

CommunitiesWorkingTogether
@argylltsi.org.uk



Living
Well

ARGYLL & BUTE

[Register now on Eventbrite](#)



Big Picture Thinking Seminar Series

2026-2027

Thursday 12 November 2026
2-4pm

Understanding Place

About this session

In this seminar Kirsten will look at how spatial classifications commonly used in policymaking and service delivery often mask the diversity of rural and island places. Using Gow's Typology of Scotland's Islands she will demonstrate how examining factors of capacity and reliance can help us better understand the particular needs and opportunities of communities, allowing us to identify more appropriate strategies for consultation, policymaking, service delivery, and evaluation. While developed for Scotland's islands, she will highlight how the underlying framework of the typology discussed might be applied to rural areas more widely. The seminar will include a group discussion on how the typology might be adapted to reflect specific needs such as public health delivery, or extended to effectively serve rural areas of Argyll.

About the speaker

Dr Kirsten Gow is a researcher based in the Isle of Jura, specialising in rural and islands research. Coming from a background working with island and rural communities, her PhD looked at island connection and diaspora in Scotland and included the development of Gow's Typology of Scotland's islands. She developed the Scottish Government Scottish Islands Typology as part of an internship with the Scottish Government in 2025.



Free to attend. All welcome.
Scan QR code for more details

CommunitiesWorkingTogether
@argylltsi.org.uk



Living
Well

ARGYLL & BUTE

[Register now on Eventbrite](#)



Big Picture Thinking Seminar Series 2026-2027

Thursday 10 December 2026
10-12pm

Collaborating With Communities

About this session

Collaboration with communities is core to improving outcomes and tackling long-standing health inequalities. The future of a free-at-point-of-use NHS depends on it — the shift towards community-based care and prevention cannot happen without genuine partnership with communities.

Yet meaningful community collaboration does not happen at scale or sustainably. Why not?

Alongside familiar challenges such as funding and capacity, there are deeper issues to face. This work asks us to confront our own limitations and those of our organisations and systems, and to take responsibility for problems that are often complex and uncomfortable.

Drawing on the Collaborating with Communities guide, Anne and Julie will create space for honest reflection and dialogue.

About the speakers

Anne Pordes has worked in and with social purpose organisations her whole career, and for the past five years has focused on creating new relationships between big organisations and communities. She is Head of Community Engagement at Our Future Health, the UK's largest health research programme.

Julie Jenson is a researcher and strategic advisor to leaders driving change in health and wellbeing. She is a certified listener poet with The Good Listening Project, a doctoral student in existential psychotherapy and counselling at Middlesex University, and an associate lecturer at UAL: Central Saint Martins.



Free to attend. All welcome.
Scan QR code for more details

CommunitiesWorkingTogether
@argylltsi.org.uk



Living Well

ARGYLL & BUTE

Register now on Eventbrite



Big Picture Thinking Seminar Series 2026-2027

Thursday 28 January 2027
10-12pm

Why Mattering Matters

About this session

In this session, Ottar will explore how people thrive when they experience that they matter — that they are valued by others and have opportunities to add value to their communities. Drawing on research on mattering, relational welfare, wellbeing, and co-creation, he will discuss how communities, public services, and local initiatives can move beyond seeing people as recipients of support and instead create conditions where people become active contributors and co-creators of collective wellbeing.

The presentation will also explore how relationships function as a public good and why relational welfare offers a promising framework for addressing contemporary challenges related to health, wellbeing, participation, and social inclusion. Ottar will use practical examples to show how these concepts can be used and understood.

About the speaker

Ottar Ness is Professor of Counselling at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Norway. He is also Co-director for NTNU WellFare: Nordic Research Centre for Wellbeing and Social Sustainability and Co-director of WHO Collaborating Centre on Well-being and Social Sustainability. His research focuses on mental health, recovery, relational welfare, community wellbeing, and the concept of mattering — the experience of feeling valued and adding value to others and society. He has published extensively on recovery-oriented practice, co-creation, relational approaches to welfare, and community participation. His current work explores how relationships, belonging, and opportunities for meaningful contribution can strengthen wellbeing, social justice, and thriving communities. Ottar works closely with service users, practitioners, communities, and policymakers to develop more relational and participatory approaches to health and welfare.



Free to attend. All welcome.
Scan QR code for more details

CommunitiesWorkingTogether
@argylltsi.org.uk



**Living
Well**

ARGYLL & BUTE

Register now on Eventbrite



Big Picture Thinking Seminar Series

2026-2027

Thursday 11 February 2027

2-4pm

Connection, Identity & Belonging

About this session

National diaspora strategies recognise the potential for those living outside of a country to contribute to national life, both at a distance and via return migration. However, less attention has been paid to how internal out-migrants from rural and island areas might be understood in a similar way. Drawing on her PhD research, Kirsten examines the continued relationship that those with island connections may continue to maintain with their communities whilst living elsewhere, and what this means for our understanding of community, identity, and belonging.

About the speaker

Dr Kirsten Gow is a researcher based in the Isle of Jura, specialising in rural and islands research. Coming from a background working with island and rural communities, her PhD looked at island connection and diaspora in Scotland and included the development of Gow's Typology of Scotland's islands. She developed the Scottish Government Scottish Islands Typology as part of an internship with the Scottish Government in 2025.



Free to attend. All welcome.
Scan QR code for more details

CommunitiesWorkingTogether
@argylltsi.org.uk



Living
Well

ARGYLL & BUTE

[Register now on Eventbrite](#)



Big Picture Thinking Seminar Series

2026-2027

Thursday 18 March 2027

10-12pm

Deliberative Democracy: Are We Smarter Together?

About this session

With declining trust in government and increasing polarisation of opinion, interest in deliberative democracy is increasing in democracies all round the world. Deliberative democracy approaches bring together diverse groups of people - many of whom aren't normally involved in public decision making - to learn about a policy issue, weigh up trade-offs and reach common ground. There's increasing evidence that, used well, deliberative approaches increase public trust and capability - allow informed public judgement (rather than off-the-cuff public opinion) and encourage people from every background to reach consensus about the trickiest social issues we are facing. This seminar will explore deliberative democracy through real life examples and help participants to consider how it could contribute to better solutions for the issues you encounter in your work and life.

About the speaker

Gillian Baxendine began her career in the UK Department of Health and joined the Scottish Parliament at its establishment in 1999. In 2018 she set up a new Participation and Communities Team for the Parliament, which uses innovative approaches to bring more voices and experiences into the work of Parliament. Last year, Gillian left the Parliament to move in to freelance work in the field of democratic innovation. She recently joined the advisory board of the Scottish People's Meeting which aims to launch a Nordic-style democracy festival for Scotland in 2027.



Free to attend. All welcome.
Scan QR code for more details

CommunitiesWorkingTogether
@argylltsi.org.uk

[Register now on Eventbrite](#)



Living
Well

ARGYLL & BUTE



Big Picture Thinking Seminar Series 2026-2027

Thursday 22 April 2027
2-4pm

Deliberative Democracy as a Practice of Change

About this session

How do we make meaningful change when the systems around us seem to resist it? This session explores democracy not simply as a way of making decisions, doing public engagement or running better meetings, but as a way of organising collective life and building the capacity for change.

Drawing on deliberative democracy as a critical paradigm, alongside critical social theory and the commons, Oliver Escobar will explore what it takes to move beyond institutional habits, narrow vested interests and short-term problem-solving towards forms of public reasoning and collective action that can help us work out what the common good might require.

The session will consider the role of power, participation and collective agency. It will ask how people working across communities, public services and the third sector can create the conditions for more democratic, hopeful and transformative ways of working together – and turn collective action into meaningful change in people's lives.

About the speaker

Professor Oliver Escobar is Chair of Public Policy and Democratic Innovation at the University of Edinburgh. His work focuses on participatory and deliberative democracy, community empowerment, democratic change, the commons and the governance of the future. He combines research, teaching and practice to explore and develop democratic innovations across a wide range of policy and community contexts in Scotland and internationally. More information: <https://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/staff/oliver-escobar>



Free to attend. All welcome.
Scan QR code for more details

CommunitiesWorkingTogether
@argylltsi.org.uk

[Register now on Eventbrite](#)



Living
Well

ARGYLL & BUTE



Big Picture Thinking 2026-2027

Seminar Series

Thursday 13 May 2027
2-4pm

Reimagining the Role of Communities in Public Life

About this session

Torange will present a system of Community–Public Partnership that reimagines a dynamic third political sphere — one that bridges the gap between the household and the state. Drawing on community-based field experience, she explores how cultural practices can activate communities, creating neighbourhood-based commons systems that challenge conventional governance. She addresses pressing societal issues, from citizen apathy and institutional distrust to the lack of awareness around creative practices that can transform political engagement. By repositioning the neighbourhood as a decentralised arena for decision-making and policy implementation, she advocates for a commons/public partnership model in place of the dominant private/public paradigm.

About the speaker

Dr Torange Khonsari is founding director of practice Public Works, widely recognised for advancing participatory urbanism and civic design. She co-founded and directed the Centre for Applied Research in Empowering Society (CARES) at London Metropolitan University, where she led interdisciplinary research addressing civic transformation and socio-ecological urban futures. Her work positions place-based practices within wider debates on democratic governance, investigating how commons-based systems can reshape relationships between citizens, institutions and the built environment. She has held advisory roles with organisations including the Design Council, Greater London Authority and the Design Museum.



Free to attend. All welcome.
Scan QR code for more details

CommunitiesWorkingTogether
@argylltsi.org.uk



Living
Well

ARGYLL & BUTE

[Register now on Eventbrite](#)



Big Picture Thinking 2026-2027

Seminar Series

Thursday 10 June 2027
10-12pm

Changing The Rules Of The Economy To Deliver Good Lives

About this session

We will explore how Wellbeing Economy concepts can reshape economic priorities to serve people and the planet. Drawing on inspiring international thinking and real-world case studies from local authorities, the talk will highlight practical pathways for rethinking growth, measuring success beyond GDP, and embedding wellbeing into policy and practice. Expect a blend of theory, local action, and forward-looking ideas to spark discussion on building economies that truly support thriving communities.

About the speaker

Lisa is Director of WEAll Scotland and has been part of the WEAll team since it was formed in 2018. As Director, she provides strategic leadership to the hub, working with members, partners and policymakers to advance the wellbeing economy agenda in Scotland. She oversees strategy and programme delivery, builds relationships across civil society and government, and supports collective action to influence policy and practice. Lisa is committed to ensuring WEAll Scotland is a collaborative, values-led network that amplifies members' voices and connects ideas to action. At WEAll Global, Lisa focused on putting wellbeing economy ideas into practice, particularly with policymakers across Europe. She also led on organisational culture, supporting the team and helping to ensure the organisation lives its values in how it works. Before joining WEAll, Lisa was Campaigns and Communications Manager at Oxfam Scotland and worked in sustainability reporting and ESG policy within the finance sector. Throughout her career, she has been driven by the power of collaboration and the belief that our systems can work better for everyone. She is also a proud mum of two and lives in East Ayrshire.



Free to attend. All welcome.
Scan QR code for more details

CommunitiesWorkingTogether
@argylltsi.org.uk



Living
Well

ARGYLL & BUTE

[Register now on Eventbrite](#)

Big Picture Thinking Seminar Series

2026-
2027

[Register now on Eventbrite](#)

Free online seminars. Inspiring international speakers.
Fresh thinking and practical approaches to the challenges
facing communities today.

Choose one, some, or all.
Scan QR Code for more details.

CommunitiesWorkingTogether@argylltsi.org.uk

Free to attend. All welcome.



Living
Well

ARGYLL & BUTE