ARGYLL & BUTE

THIRD SECTOR INTERFACE

Annual report 2025/26

Supporting our sector.



Practical support. Community voice.
Stronger connections across Argyll and Bute.

1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026

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1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026

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A note from our CEO

1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026



This year showed the strength of Argyll and Bute's charities, community groups, social enterprises and volunteers. Despite rising costs, uncertain funding and growing demand, they continued to support people and bring communities together.

At Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface, our job is to help these organisations succeed. From 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, we combined practical help with a stronger voice for the sector. We also listened carefully to what organisations need from us in the years ahead.

Practical help where it matters

Our staff recorded more than 2,000 support contacts during the year. These included help with funding, running organisations, developing projects and recruiting volunteers. Some organisations needed support through difficult decisions about their future. Each contact represents time spent helping people find a way forward, although organisations may have contacted us more than once.

Our Community Directory and funding platform helped people find local services and funding opportunities. The Inveraray Hub provided space for organisations to meet and work together. Our local support plans recognised that travel, premises and access to volunteers can be especially challenging in rural and island communities.

Positive Destinations helped people build confidence and skills through supported volunteering and individual mentoring. Thirty-one people completed the programme during the year with some incredible personal stories of resilience and growth. Uncertainty about future funding affected planning following the conclusion of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, reminding us why reliable funding matters to both organisations and the people they support. However, we have successfully obtained funding through the No One Left Behind programme for 2026-2027.

We also continued to manage the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund locally on behalf of the Scottish Government. In October 2025, the funding panel awarded support to 44 organisations for two years as part of the Government's multi-year funding pilot. The fund supports local approaches to mental wellbeing and social connection and is an important part of the local funding landscape. The Scottish Government has announced a further year's funding for 2027.

Listening and speaking up

Our winter 2025 sector survey received 181 responses. Four focus groups with over 70 in-person participants helped us explore the findings in more detail. Organisations told us about funding pressures, volunteer shortages, growing demand and the extra costs of serving dispersed communities.

They also asked for stronger representation, better shared information, practical support and more opportunities to work together. This evidence shaped our developing strategy for 2026–2031. At the end of March, that strategy was still being developed, with the evidence base and State of the Sector report published in May and the strategy published in October 2026.

Through Our Voices Matter, we worked with more than 40 charities and local organisations to challenge proposed reductions in community health and care support. We argued that helping people early should be central to decisions about services and budgets.

The campaign helped create the conditions to ease the impact of proposed cuts. However, it did not protect every service: carers centres still faced a 15% budget reduction. Our work must therefore continue beyond individual budget decisions, towards better planning and fairer funding.

A note from our CEO, continued

We also brought local experience into national discussions through the TSI Scotland Network and Argyll and Bute TSI contributed to the national TSI Network manifesto ahead of Scottish parliamentary elections in 2026. Argyll and Bute TSI supplied local testimony to the Parliamentary Health and Social Care Committee in January 2026 on IJB voting rights for those with lived experience, which was successfully enacted at the end of the parliamentary term and came into operation as at 1st September 2026.

We continue to promote Community Wealth Building (CWB), with the aim of keeping more spending, jobs, and opportunities within local communities. Following Argyll and Bute TSI's work with local partners to drive the CWB agenda, in November 2025, Argyll and Bute Council adopted a CWB charter and noted the 23 recommendations in a report commissioned by the TSI on behalf of the Community Planning Partnership. A March 2026 seminar on CWB attracted 46 participants reflecting keen local interest in this fast-developing area.

Connecting people and supporting wellbeing

Communities Working Together strengthened links between community organisations and health and care partners. A Walking Development Officer joined in May 2025. Work mapped local walking activities and developed connections with GP practices to prepare walking prescription pilots.

Five winter seminars explored prevention, community involvement and partnership leadership. Training helped people capture learning from community discussions. A group of practitioners also began organising its own sessions and sharing support.

These activities created useful foundations. We recognise, though, that stronger relationships must lead to practical improvements, but it is heartening to see these skills being used in complex multi-sector discussions.

I thank our staff, trustees, volunteers, member organisations, funders and partners. Your time, care and determination made this work possible.

Looking forward

Since the reporting year ended, our Board has approved the 2026–2031 strategy. Our next task is to turn the 35 commitments with a potential 140 actions arising from the strategy into a coherent, resourced and prioritised implementation plan, while continuing the everyday support that organisations rely on. We will continue to seek new funding sources for the sector and to build productive, supportive alliances and services.

Scotland's Public Service Reform agenda is framing the discussion about the shape of local government, health and social care. Its focus on prevention and joined-up services offers an opportunity for communities to shape decisions. That opportunity must come with fair funding and genuine influence.

Our event in Arrochar on 22 October 2026 brought partners together to explore how this could work locally. The emerging Partnership Action Brief focuses on community influence, shared knowledge, practical prevention and clear responsibility for action.

We will keep asking whether our work makes support easier to find, strengthens local organisations and gives communities more say over the decisions affecting their lives and as per the requests from the strategy consultation process, we will be asking members to complete an annual survey to better understand and track the health of the sector.

Our ambition is stronger communities, supported by organisations that are heard, valued and able to plan confidently for the future.



Takki Sulaiman
Chief Executive, Argyll and Bute TSI

Impact at a glance

A year of practical support, stronger connections and community action across Argyll and Bute.

2,000+
recorded support interactions

339
funding advice requests

31
Positive Destinations completions

181
sector survey responses

46,000
ABTSI website page views

12,000
Community Directory users

157,820
social media impressions

70
strategy focus group attendees

180+
VOY 2025 nominations

Support interactions are recorded contacts, not unique organisations. Digital figures measure different forms of reach and should not be added together. Figures from the 2025/26 draft and supplied VOY return.

A helping hand for local groups

Funding, governance and organisational advice helped groups respond to pressure and plan their next steps.

What groups asked us for help with

Our team recorded more than 2,000 support contacts during the year. Funding advice was the most requested type of help, with 339 requests. We recorded 194 requests for support with the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund and 133 for governance advice. A further 112 requests concerned organisational development and 105 were for help with new projects.

These figures cover selected categories. Some organisations contacted us more than once.

Space to meet and collaborate

129

member bookings at the Inveraray Hub

16

paid bookings at the Inveraray Hub

The Inveraray Hub gives community organisations a centrally located place to meet, run training and work together without having to maintain their own premises.

Work to improve the Hub in 2026/27 is underway, including upgrades to the heating and a refresh of the décor to make the space more comfortable and welcoming.

Listening to what matters

181

sector survey responses

70

focus group attendees across Argyll and Bute





Community Voices strategy focus groups, February 2026.

Local experience shaping our next strategy

Our Community Voices research brought together 181 survey responses and 70 people at focus groups across Argyll and Bute in February 2026. Groups spoke about funding pressures and volunteer fatigue, and called for more opportunities to work together, a stronger collective voice and practical support. Their feedback helped shape our 2026–2031 strategy.

Making the case for earlier support

During 2025/26, ABTSI commissioned reviews of day care and community-based preventative support for children and families, working with partners including the HSCP and All Our Children network. The research highlighted the vital role of trusted local organisations in helping older people stay connected and supporting families before difficulties escalate. It also identified uneven access, transport barriers and insecure funding. Recommendations called for better coordination, clearer routes into support and sustainable investment in community provision, providing evidence to inform future service planning.

Our Voices Matter

A collective campaign to protect preventative services

40+

charities and local organisations worked with ABTSI

Why the sector came together

Our Voices Matter brought together charities, community groups, unpaid carers and residents in response to Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership's 2026/27 budget proposals. Campaign meetings in December 2025 and February 2026 helped shape a shared response to proposed savings affecting carers' services, community transport and other local support.

What the campaign called for

- Protect preventative services and early support that help people stay independent and connected.
- Pause reductions that weaken community services while their wider impact is assessed.
- Scrutinise acute hospital costs and look at how care works across hospital and community services.
- Involve communities, carers and the third sector as equal partners in redesigning services.

Bringing local experience into decisions

Case studies showed what proposed changes could mean for people and families. The campaign also contributed to the Joint Strategic Plan for 2026–2031 and helped ease the impact of some proposed cuts. Some services remained affected.

Explore the campaign and case studies

TSI Scotland Network conference

28–29 October 2025 / Scottish Event Campus, Glasgow

150+ TSI staff from across Scotland attended each day







Closing remarks, a service design workshop and an Adapt & Thrive presentation.

Day one / Practice

ABTSI Chief Executive Takki Sulaiman opened the conference. The Head of Regulation at OSCR gave the keynote. Sessions focused on improving how TSIs work and support the sector.

Day two / Policy

Ivan McKee MSP, Minister for Public Finance with responsibility for public service reform, spoke on day two. Sessions focused on engaging with local and national decision-makers and partners.

ABTSI hosted the 2025 conference, organising bookings and helping deliver both days. We look forward to attending the 2026 conference.

Supporting our communities

Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for Adults

Year 5 | 2025/26

71
applications received

44
applicants awarded funding

62%
application success rate, rounded

19
organisations fully funded for both years

More certainty to plan ahead

Year 5 introduced a multi-year approach through the Scottish Government's Fairer Funding Pilot. The October 2025 panel awarded funding at some level in both Years 5 and 6 to 44 of 71 applicants, including 19 whose requests were fully funded for both years. Second-year funding remained subject to the relevant funding and delivery conditions.

The Fund prioritises prevention, reducing isolation and loneliness, and tackling inequalities. ABTSI guided applicants and helped develop locally led projects, from befriending and community hubs to inclusive activities that bring adults together.

ABCAN
Argyll & Bute
Climate Action Network

ABCAN Seed Fund

£18,000
awarded in 2025/26

~£75,000
distributed across 7 rounds

Round 6 awarded £11,000 in September 2025 and Round 7 awarded £7,000 in January 2026. Grants supported work including community food growing, woodland volunteering and sharing practical climate ideas.

Communities Working Together

Community-led health and wellbeing

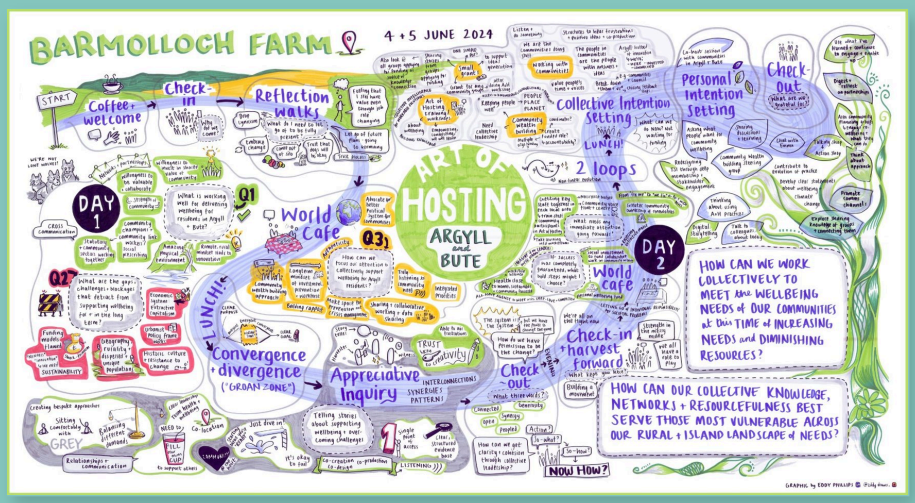
Hosted by the TSI and funded by Argyll and Bute HSCP and Macmillan Cancer Support, Communities Working Together brings organisations and public services together around prevention, walking development and participatory leadership.

Walking for wellbeing

A Walking Development Officer recruited in 2025/26 mapped walking initiatives across the region and carried out detailed route mapping in Campbeltown and Lochgilphead. The officer helped develop a partnership with We Are With You and local GP practices to introduce walking prescriptions in both towns.

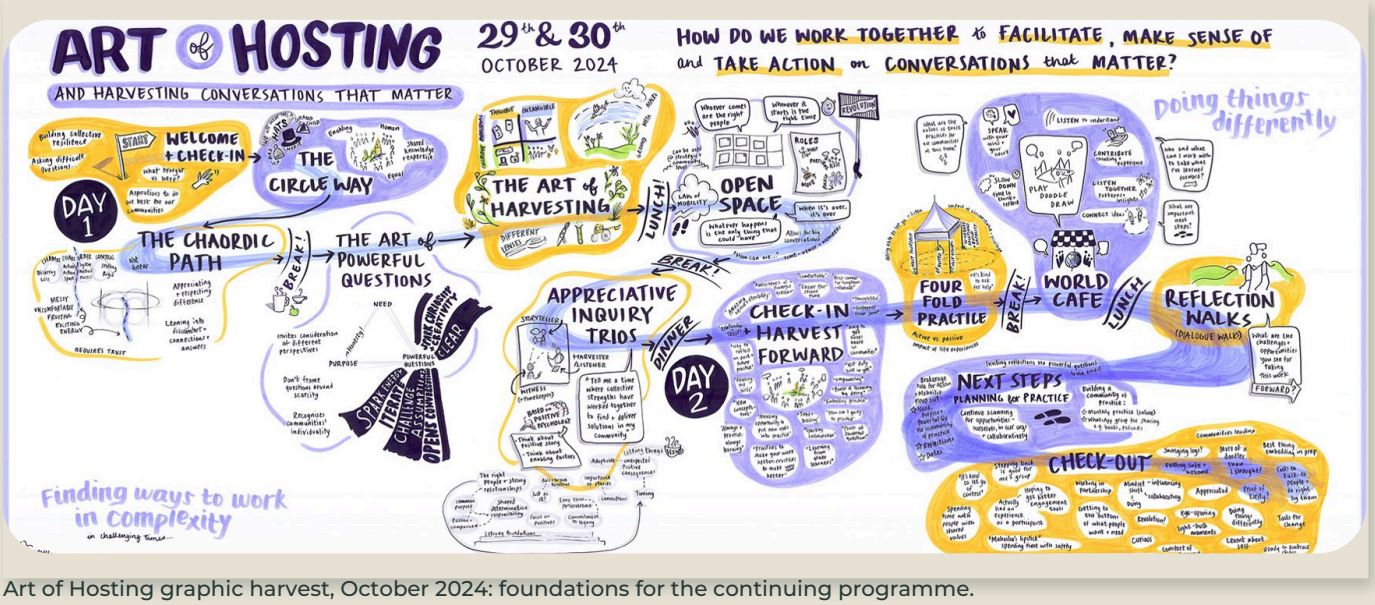
Shared learning, local action

The Big Picture Thinking Seminar Series brought national and international speakers to Argyll and Bute to explore co-production, systems thinking and place-based approaches. Now well into its second season, the series creates opportunities to share ideas and consider how services and communities can work together.



Art of Hosting at Barmolloch Farm, June 2024: foundations for the continuing programme.

Learning into community action



Art of Hosting graphic harvest, October 2024: foundations for the continuing programme.

£24,000

Public Health grant for participatory leadership

50%

of the fund awarded so far

Building confidence and connections

The Art of Hosting Community of Practice is now largely self-organising, with members creating opportunities to share learning and support one another. Art of Harvesting training developed skills in capturing learning from participatory work.

The Public Health grant helps others use participatory leadership across Argyll and Bute. Half has been awarded so far, with discussions continuing on the remainder.



Workshop reflections: next steps.

Looking ahead

The programme supported the Living Well Strategy refresh and secured a communications strategy commission. A report and recommendations will inform its future, building on three years of funding.

The Community Tree

St Conan's Kirk Christmas Tree Festival







The Community Tree and its speech-bubble decorations at St Conan's Kirk.

The voice of the sector

Our interactive Christmas tree celebrated the volunteers, groups, charities and social enterprises that help communities across Argyll and Bute thrive. Quotes hung from its branches in speech bubbles. When visitors passed, a motion sensor triggered a speaker that read the quotes aloud, turning the tree into "the voice of the sector".

Visitors could add their own voice by answering three questions on an iPad about how they connect with their community. Their answers helped us understand how we could better support local groups and volunteers.

Branding and handmade tree by Katie Edge Mellor, Own Way Co.

Local connections. New opportunities.

Bringing volunteering closer to communities

A day of connection in Oban



Rockfield Centre, Oban

On 7 March 2026, 28 local voluntary sector organisations came together at the Rockfield Centre for a networking event and Volunteer Fair organised by the TSI in partnership with the Scottish Parliament. Morning presentations explored engaging with decision-makers, followed by an afternoon where groups showcased their work and volunteering opportunities.

The event created space for organisations to share ideas and make connections, while giving residents a chance to meet local groups and discover ways to get involved.

Volunteering on your doorstep in Sandbank

Sandbank Community Development Trust approached the TSI for facilitation support and worked with Scenic Sandbank to deliver a village Volunteer Fair on 20 September 2025. Local groups offered opportunities ranging from an occasional hour of help to joining a committee, with children's activities and refreshments creating a welcoming morning.

Groups represented Gaelic, nature, sailing, befriending, youth activities, arts and community spaces. The organisers also thanked Ferguslie Garage and CX Services Ltd for their support.



Sandbank Village Hall, Cowal

See how the fairs were promoted on page 17.

Celebrating the power of volunteering

Volunteer of the Year Awards 2025



180+
nominations

17
award categories

709+
recording views

Held on Friday 6 June at Rosslea Hall Hotel in Rhu, VOY 2025 welcomed over 155 guests and more than 260 live online viewers. Hosted by Janis Marshall-Reilly, with a performance by Joy Dunlop, it was our largest celebration to date.

Three new categories - Gaelic Volunteer of the Year, Sustainability Champion and Creative Legacy Award - recognised contributions to our environment, culture and heritage. Nominations grew from 110 across 14 categories in 2024 to over 180 across 17 categories in 2025.

Coverage in every local newspaper and a Scottish Parliament motion from Jackie Baillie MSP extended recognition beyond the ceremony. Celebrating individuals, teams and organisations helps volunteers feel valued, raises the profile of volunteering and encourages others to get involved.

"We all had a lovely time and Elaine is over the moon with her well deserved sustainability award."

"I watched online and was simply stunned to win the Community Learning Award."

"The young people were so excited to be there."

With thanks to Live Argyll, Argyll Community Housing Association, Argyll and Bute HSCP and Bòrd na Gàidhlig for their support.

Sharing the stories behind the awards

Local press coverage and community reactions



This year's winners were all smiles at the award ceremony.

Volunteers scoop honours

The outstanding efforts of volunteers from Oban, Lorn and the Isles have been honoured at the Argyll and Bute TSI Volunteer of the Year Awards.

Taking place during Volunteers' Week, the awards ceremony was held at Rosslea Hall in Rhu on Friday June 6.

With over 180 nominations made across the 17 award categories, the ceremony showcased just how vital volunteers are to the life of our communities.

The Regional Hero award for Oban & Lorn was awarded to Alison Craig, a strong advocate for Gaelic culture.

Alison heads Oban's Comann nam Parant and promotes Gaelic language through education and community activities.

Tiree's Carol Flett won the Regional Hero award for the Islands. Carol fundraises for the charity Cùram Thiriodh, to support the island's meals on wheels service and transport for medical appointments.

Young Volunteer of the Year went to Naomi Rimmer from New Hope Café Oban. She was nominated for demonstrating reliability and enthusiasm in community food support initiatives.

Local heroes also made a clean sweep of this year's three new award categories: Sustainability, Creative Legacy, and Gaelic Volunteer of the Year.

Elaine Walton, winner of the new Sustainability Champion award, was nominated for her voluntary work at Oban's GRAB Trust. Elaine's work has empowered others to reuse and repurpose textiles, while emphasising the vital role of good governance through active trusteeship.

The Gaelic Volunteer Award went to Oban's Arlene MacLeod, who founded Aon Ghuth, a Gaelic Makaton Choir, to support bi-lingualism and inclusivity for young people with additional needs.

The Creative Legacy Award went to Andrew Servant from Taynuilt, who chairs the Taynuilt Highland Games Committee. Andrew promotes children's cultural involvement through mini events and tuition in piping and drumming.

The event brought together over 155 guests in person, and more than 260 viewers via livestream.

Oban Times



A lifetime achievement award proves Dee-lightful

by Ellis Butcher

Dee Carrick, left, with other volunteers at Moving On Mid Argyll, including Keith Evans, centre, co-ordinator of the new MOMA food share hub.

Argyllshire Advertiser



Thursday June 12, 2025 — Helensburgh Advertiser

VOLUNTEERS HONOURED AT RHU CEREMONEY

Tristan Stewart-Robertson

Heroes hailed

Helensburgh Advertiser

Local newspapers took the awards beyond the ceremony, sharing stories such as Dee Carrick's Lifetime Achievement Award and the achievements of volunteers in Oban, Lorn and the Isles and Helensburgh and Lomond.

The conversation continued online





Destination Helensburgh celebrated overall winner Elizabeth Lambert. Dunoon Community Council congratulated SOAP, Cowal's Regional Hero.

HOPE Kitchen shared the livestream and celebrated Young Volunteer of the Year Naomi Rimmer. ReMake Argyll celebrated Sustainability Champion Elaine Walton.

Helping people find their local fair

Event publicity in Sandbank and Oban

Sandbank



Event artwork invited residents to browse stalls, meet local groups and find a way to volunteer that suited them.

Oban



Publicity for the Rockfield Centre fair highlighted local volunteering opportunities and the pop-up childcare available on the day.

Sandbank in the local press



Sandbank prepares for Volunteer Fair

THE VILLAGE of Sandbank is gearing up to celebrate the power of community spirit next weekend with a special Volunteer Fair at Sandbank Village Hall.

The free event, on Saturday, September 20, will run from 10am until noon and is being organised by Sandbank Community Development Trust, Scenic Sandbank and Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface (TSI).

The fair will showcase the huge variety of ways locals can get involved and volunteer for their community, from giving just an hour now and again to taking on a more regular role, there's something for everyone.

Visitors can browse stalls, chat directly to groups, and discover how their skills - big or small - could make a difference. Children will be kept entertained with arts and crafts while adults enjoy light refreshments and one-to-one conversations with organisations.

A wide mix of local groups will be represented, including Sandbank Community Garden, Oakbank Community Inn, Holy Loch Sailing Club, Interloch Community Transport, Sandbank Parent and Toddler Group, Scouts and Cubs, Sandbank Senior Citizens' Club, Upper Cowal Bowling Club, Cowal University of the Third Age and Cowal Open Studios.

Each stall will outline the opportunities available, from hands-on help to behind-the-scenes support, giving residents the chance to find the perfect volunteering role to match their interests and availability.

Sue McKillop of Scenic Sandbank and Oakbank Community Inn said, "Our projects have come so far - and offer our village so much - and Volunteers are at the heart of that. We do need more people willing to give a hand here and there, from short term contributions through to joining our boards. There's something for everyone - and the Fair will be the perfect chance for the community to find out more."

Janis Marshall Reilly, Third Sector Support Advisor for Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface added:

"Volunteering is at the heart of community life in Argyll and Bute and the TSI is delighted to support this event as part of our wider role in connecting people and organisations across the region. Sandbank Volunteer Fair will be a chance to see just how many opportunities exist on the doorstep of residents from the top of the Holy Loch, through Sandhaven, right along the shoreline - and across the full village. Everyone is welcome. Bring your curiosity, your skills, your desire to learn - and have a chat about how you could make a difference to Sandbank."

Parking and bus stops available nearby Sandbank Village Hall. The venue is wheelchair and buggy accessible. Everyone, of all ages, welcome. For further information, please contact John Parker at j.parker@academyslm.co.uk, or visit argylltsi.org/events

For wider volunteering support across Argyll and Bute, visit www.argylltsi.org/volunteering



Sandbank to host Volunteer Fair this September

Two advance cuttings introduced the village fair and highlighted the range of groups taking part.

Our resources in 2025/26

Income, expenditure and funds at 31 March 2026

Income and expenditure



£79,068 deficit for the year

Expenditure exceeded income by £79,068. Restricted funding supports specific purposes and is not freely available for core costs.

A large proportion of our income and expenditure relates to grants we distribute.

Funds at year end



£375,892

Unrestricted funds

Available for the charity's purposes

£102,511

Restricted funds

Must be used for funders' specified purposes

Total funds: £478,403

Read alongside the full financial statements and reserves policy.