

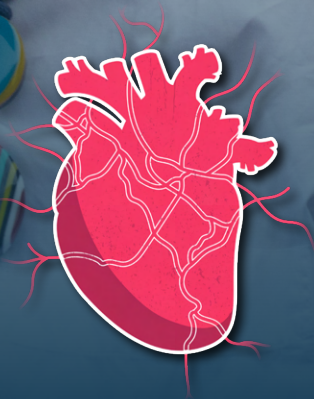
Impact Report



—Keep the *beat*

ALIVE

Make the
difference for
people in South
Lanarkshire



2024



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Introduction

Welcome to our Impact Report, where we showcase the invaluable work of the third sector in South Lanarkshire.

We're exploring the impact of these organisations, collectively referred to here as the 'heartbeat' of our communities, and will delve into the transformative work they undertake daily.

From Blantyre Soccer Academy to Rain or Shine, and Leadhills Community Company to Healthy & Active, these organisations exemplify the spirit of compassion, innovation, and collaboration that defines our communities.

But be in no doubt. Our sector is in trouble. The strain is greater than it has ever been and we need action now that genuinely brings about change.

Almost every organisation who contributed to this report told us that their service would not be replaced if they were unable to deliver it. That's a stark warning.

At the heart of this report lies a profound purpose: to elevate the voices and experiences of those positively impacted by the services and initiatives delivered by our sector.

Through compelling stories, insightful data and first-hand testimonials from supported people, we're shining a bright light on the remarkable achievements - and challenges - faced by these organisations, that threaten their very existence.

Central to this report and the wider 'Keep the Beat Alive' campaign, are three key 'asks'.

We call upon stakeholders at all levels to **recognise and celebrate the value of the third sector in South Lanarkshire**. Their contributions extend far beyond the provision of services; they are the bedrock upon which our communities thrive.

Secondly, we advocate for a **re-think in how the third sector is funded**, urging policymakers and funders to adopt smarter approaches that reflect the needs and complexities of third sector organisations. By thinking cleverly and sustainably, we can ensure the long-term effectiveness of these vital services.

Lastly, we believe it is critical to enhance collaboration and communication between the public and third sector. By fostering **meaningful partnerships and dialogue**, we can harness the collective expertise and resources of both sectors to address pressing challenges and drive positive change in our communities.

As you explore this report, you'll see the resilience, impact and potential of the third sector in South Lanarkshire. Despite facing significant challenges, these organisations continue to make a profound impact on our communities.

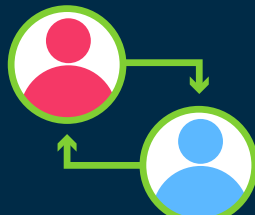
But it's clear that the third sector needs our support if it is to survive. Yes, we need to recognise their efforts, but more than that: we must work to ensure they have the resources necessary to not just survive, but thrive.



Recognise our value



Be smarter about funding

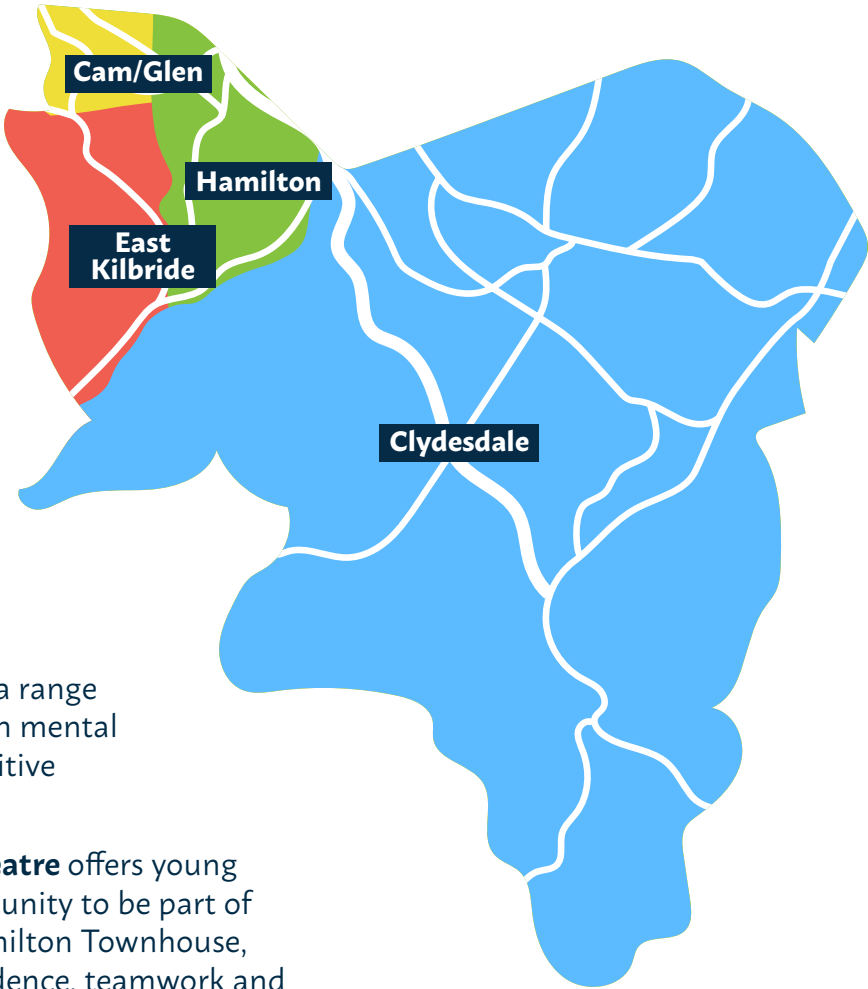


Meaningfully engage with us

Four localities

Voluntary Action South Lanarkshire's work is split across four localities - let's explain it and introduce four organisations to get us started:

- **Cambuslang & Rutherglen:** **Revolve Recycle** is an environmental project which aims to tackle climate change by offering a range of co-designed products and services which help people to reduce their carbon footprint
- **Clydesdale:** **St Athanasius Community Hall** is a flexible modern facility available for use by a range of different groups to provide their services
- **East Kilbride:** **Agape Wellbeing** provide a range of activities which are all free for adults with mental health and wellbeing issues to promote positive mental health
- **Hamilton:** **Hamilton District Youth Theatre** offers young people across South Lanarkshire the opportunity to be part of full musical theatre productions at the Hamilton Townhouse, as well as supporting them with their confidence, teamwork and communication skills



For the Keep The Beat Alive campaign, we have grouped third sector organisations into four types of support, although many could sit across multiple categories.



Health & Wellbeing



Connected Communities



Support at home



Education and employment

Names with a star

Where we include a * next to a name, we have used a pseudonym, to protect a person or their family's identity.

Darcy's changed my life

Jack knows that becoming part of Darcy's has transformed his life. Now he's ready for college.

Sometimes there's relief in a diagnosis, but for Jack he felt that confirmation of an autism diagnosis left him feeling labelled, rather than supported.

"Rather than seeing me as a person who was struggling, they saw me as a person with autism," he said.

"So I gave up on doctors which made me give up on myself."

As it happened, the annual TV fundraiser BBC Children in Need, was to provide an unexpected intervention which would change his life.

Darcy's Equine Assisted Learning works with young people experiencing poor mental health, who have disengaged with education and mainstream services, to support them using equine-based activities.

They may have been one of many to feature that night, but this was the organisation that captured the imagination of Jack's mum.

"I was just upstairs when she was watching it, and she shouted me down [the stairs] and said I would love it. She said, 'you need to go!'"

Despite finding change difficult to deal with, Jack agreed to visit, and he reveals just how quickly things took a turn for the better.

Initially he participated in a ten week course called Horses & Herbs, but now he volunteers, spending as much time as he can outdoors.



"It was almost as if I saw life in a different light," Jack said

"This was from years and years of being failed by professionals. Two hours up at Darcy's I was like, 'this is amazing'. It is so interesting, and brilliant!"

"Up at Darcy's - and it is one of the things that struck me on the first day I was up here - you step in, and all of that weight is taken off.

"That's not because I've forgotten what I am worried about.

"It's like, there's birds, there's frogs hiding under little rocks, the horses wondering where their hay nets are. There's so much more to life than worrying about things.

"I joke with people here that it's like there's magic around it. The second you drive up that road and you pass the first gate, it is how I imagine a little kid in Disneyland because it just relieves you. This is how you relax, sit back. It's wonderful."

The first course was to have a profound effect on Jack, which is leading him towards college and a potential career working with animals.

"Within the first couple of sessions of the **Horses & Herbs Course**, me and Hugh [the facilitator] got along.

"That's not like me, as I was never a very social person. We were talking, and I was learning about these little herbs that horses know what to look for if they have a sore hoof or a sore back.

"After a year of volunteering, I felt I needed to do this. I started to think about college. That's completely unlike me.

"I went from someone who would sit in my room all day. I've now applied and been accepted to South Lanarkshire College and I am starting in August.

It is mind boggling because all of it can be attributed to Darcy's. Being up here has changed my life, has changed me for the better."

Jack is aware that the pressure on Darcy's - like so many community organisations - is unbelievably difficult.

He has one hope.

"There's nothing I would like more than for this place to get the funding it deserves".

Another organisation called **Farmigos** provides opportunities for vulnerable children and teenagers to work with and care for pets and farm animals.

According to SCVO's latest Third Sector Tracker, "Poor mental health and well-being" was the number one issue that third sector organisations saw in the final quarter of 2023, at 65%.

Watch our film featuring Jack's story here

Wellness warriors

Providing vital health and wellbeing support across South Lanarkshire at a time when it is never more needed.

In developing this report, 57 organisations submitted evidence of the part they play in helping people in South Lanarkshire to live happier, healthier lives.

These organisations are the lifeblood of the community's health services, stepping in to provide support where the public bodies cannot help.

With deep local knowledge and a commitment to service, they ensure that every resident has access to the support necessary for a healthy, fulfilling life.

This commitment is exemplified by organisations like the **Asthma and Allergy Foundation** and **Agape Wellbeing**.

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation's Breathing Room Project which is a national initiative but deployed at a local level in South Lanarkshire, plays a critical role in educating school children and their communities about asthma.

It showcases the essential nature of targeted health education and how people with asthma can be supported to live ordinary lives.

Agape Wellbeing's TATTA project uses the arts to support people with their mental health, demonstrating the diverse approaches within the third sector to promote wellbeing.

Both organisations highlight the importance of recognising the sector's value, particularly in areas where traditional health services may not reach or fully address specific community needs.

For anyone struggling to cope, **Samaritans of Lanarkshire** are always available to listen without judgement or pressure.

The reality is that when organisations across South Lanarkshire are able to support people they make a difference.

For example, organisations supported by the **Integrated Care Fund** managed by **VASLAN**, demonstrated strong public health outcomes.

The issue is, of course, that these interventions are often very time limited, which makes it difficult to build a more sustainable long-term approach.

Sometimes improved wellbeing comes from the simplest things, like becoming more active or finding new connections.

Brian (34) experienced extremely poor mental health and lost his job. This anxious spiral cost him friends and almost his family. He was encouraged to join **Carstairs Thistle AFC**, and it has changed his life.

"It's like a form of therapy - being part of Carstairs Thistle has helped me and my family more than I could ever put into words," he says.

If football's not your thing, what about **Clydesdale Netball Club**, **Hamilton Judo Club**, or **Lanark Thistle Bowling Club**, who provide opportunities for people of all ages and stages. There's also **East Kilbride Youth Disability Sports Club** who provide young people and adults with additional support needs to participate in sport.

And with groups like **Come Paint With Us**, **Chatty Crafters**, **Clydesdale Community Activities Group**, **Larkhall Community Growers** and **U3A in East Kilbride**, there are so many opportunities for people to find connection and build new relationships, regardless of their age and stage in life.



Health & Wellbeing
1,980 services

Isolation can be particularly difficult for those in rural locations. Organisations such as **Forth Community Resource Centre** provide support to remote parts of South Lanarkshire.

And for people living with dementia and their carers, the award-winning **Stonehouse Jubilee Club** offers a much needed weekly social afternoon.

Twelve organisations were awarded funding through the **Integrated Care Fund** to support **6,865** people to improve their health & wellbeing.

£317,116 saving

Physical and mental health interventions through the fund helped avoid almost 1,000 formal NHS interventions representing this saving

Men's Sheds

There are currently **14 Men's Sheds** in operation across South Lanarkshire, supporting **350 men**.

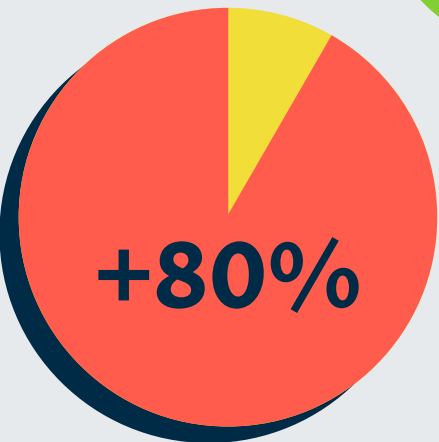
For example, the Bothwell & Uddingston Men's Shed is an entirely volunteer led (42) organisation.

Not only do they support each other, but they contribute to the local community by making and donating items to nurseries, care homes, school fairs, the local music festival and more!



Living in the present with LAMH

Tina* tells us about her experience with Lanarkshire Association for Mental Health (LAMH), an organisation which receives more than 80% of all funding from the public sector.



I remember the first time my grief counsellor suggested mindfulness.

After several sessions, the subject was gently broached as a way for me to begin to cope.

I remember the sarcastic snort I gave when my very brief exploration of the internet explained that it was about being ‘in the present’.

At that point ‘being in the present’ to me was an abstract concept and a ludicrous one at that.

All I was being, was existing, surviving and hoping that the next day would be easier than the one before. It could take between two and eight years, my counsellor told me to overcome the loss of my sister.

Medication helped me work through the initial stages of grief, but I had not been prepared for the ‘life after’ and being independent from my soulmate.

When it became clear that my medication needed an overhaul, my GP also suggested further help with my mental health through the Community Psychiatric Nurse who recommended the Lanarkshire Association for Mental Health.

I remember the first time meditating, thinking, just listen and do as you are told. So I did.

I learned over the following weeks simple tips and steps to stop me in my tracks when things got too difficult. I began to feel different as it helped me make sense of the jumble of thoughts in my head.

I learned truly what it meant to live in the present. To be happy with today, with the morning, or the next hour or the next five minutes.

Plans change, I learned that lesson - big style - so I don’t get hung up on them now. As long as I’m okay today, that’s good for me and if I’m not, I’ll try again tomorrow.

I learned the benefit of stopping, and taking timeout to focus on my body and my breathing. It didn’t take the pain away like a miracle cure, but helped calm me down to be able to cope.

With these new found survival skills of meditation and recognising the thoughts I have, my mental health has improved enormously.

Recently I lay in bed, with the usual desire to waste the day away, but this time I recognised the triggers and made a choice to do something differently.

I got up and went for a run in the car and stopped at one point to simply take in the view and feel the sun and breeze . I took that ‘mindfulness’ time out and focused on my precious commodity of breath. I remember that I smiled and I felt happy.

It’s good ‘living in the present’ and I can’t thank Pauline and LAMH enough for giving me that gift.

Six more examples - supporting health & wellbeing



Let’s Talk FAB provides emotional support to women and men dealing with baby loss or experiencing fertility issues.

Reach Out Community Wellbeing and Support is a volunteer-led organisation that supports individuals struggling with their mental health and wellbeing in one-to-one, group and community engagement sessions.



SMILE Children’s Charity offer support to families from all over Lanarkshire with children with disabilities and life-limiting conditions, by offering holistic therapies to revitalise and remove stress.



Health & Wellbeing
1,980 services



Talk Now are a trauma-informed counselling and support service, for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, sexual assault, domestic abuse and childhood trauma as a result of domestic abuse.



MorphFit Gentle Movement Project is a community action project which delivers activities for older people to become a little fitter, and in turn help reduce the risk of loneliness and isolation



Parkinson’s UK Lanarkshire & Glasgow South Group support people with Parkinson’s and their families or carers.

Taking the 3C to success - driving change in rural communities

In remote areas of South Lanarkshire, one of the most common challenges people face is bridging the gap between rural and urban.

And when the public transport options are limited or none existent, people are left in cars, congesting roads and polluting green spaces.

But it's about more than that, because lack of access to transport disproportionately affects people with limited income, and increases the risk of social isolation.

We visited (or rather travelled on) Climate Action Strathaven's 3C bus service to learn about how an enterprising community is helping the environment and reducing social isolation by providing effective public transport.

This is where the 3C bus service, operated by Climate Action Strathaven, has become a vital service.

Not only has it bridged the physical distance from the rural town of Strathaven, through neighbouring Stonehouse, to Glasgow city centre, but it helps reduce carbon emissions and promotes social inclusivity.

It has become a lifeline for the community, enhancing accessibility to education, employment, and healthcare in the urban centres of Glasgow - and even Edinburgh.



For **Mary Barrett** the ability to get into Glasgow in just over an hour has been, "absolutely wonderful".

She said: "I know we can measure the carbon footprint, but I have been so happy to have this in Strathaven.

"One of the things that stopped me going into Glasgow was the struggle to get there. You had to get a bus to Hamilton, then a train into the city centre, then a bus out to the west end to my favourite place, Kelvingrove.

"On Thursday I left Strathaven at 12pm and I was sitting at five past one at Kelvingrove listening to the organ recital."

Mary - who loves to chat to her fellow passengers - says her views are similar to others.

She says that being able to access services such as galleries, exhibitions and libraries has been a hugely positive experience.

Mary said: "Last week a really old lady told me it was her birthday last week and she said it was the 'best birthday present I could have ever had'.

"I was asking another lady if she had a word to say about the bus and she said, 'stress-free'."

The conception of the 3C service was driven by the climate crisis and a communal desire to enact tangible change at a local level.

"When we saw the climate crisis getting more exposure in the news back in 2018-2019, it made us think 'what are we doing here in our little town to combat it ourselves?'" explains **Alison Harley**, service manager at CAS.

The 3C service emerged from a study of commuter patterns in Strathaven and a response to community needs.

Alison recounts the process of establishing the need for the service:

She said: "One of the trustees actually went out to one of the main roads leaving Strathaven with a clicker one morning and counted how many cars were leaving the town.

"We were staggered by the amount (of cars) that passed."

Since its launch in October 2022, the first 3C bus (a 53 seater) has significantly reduced the carbon footprint of daily commuters, and the service has now issued over 125,000 individual fares to date.

It has profoundly impacted local travel habits, offering a viable, sustainable alternative to car journeys.

"We surveyed customers last year and found that over 73% of passengers would have previously used a car for their journey into Glasgow," says Alison.

"We have several stories from really old people saying, 'My God, you've changed my life'.

"Elderly people will now make the trip into Glasgow for shopping and even hospital appointments that would have been impossible if not for 3C."

Climate Action Strathaven views the 3C bus as a model for sustainable community transport across rural South Lanarkshire. They added a second bus in August 2023 to keep up with increasing demand.



According to data from Rural Scotland Data Dashboard 2023, there is a higher reliance on cars in rural areas, and lower use of public transport, with journey times to key services longer than elsewhere in Scotland.

Unable to forward plan

Hamilton Citizens Advice Bureau's call for smarter funding as service disruption affects people in the local area - and beyond.

In South Lanarkshire, organisations like Citizens Advice Bureaus (CABs) stand as crucial pillars of support for people navigating life's complexities.

However, the effectiveness and reach of such services are often hampered by the limitations of current funding models.

Jennifer Howdle, the Chief Officer of Hamilton CAB, sheds light on the pressing need for smarter funding strategies to ensure the sustainability and expansion of vital community services.

Hamilton CAB, is fortunate that it receives funding from various sources, but faces significant challenges due to the nature of how and when funding is given.



Jennifer highlights, "It prevents forward planning for some of our services if we cannot guarantee them for more than one year.

"If a service is only funded on a yearly basis, we have to pause referrals towards the end of the financial year while we await confirmation of renewal."

And it's not just about specific services, but the need for unrestricted funding to keep the doors open.

"CABs need more funding towards core costs, to ensure we can keep our doors open and our lights on," Jennifer adds.

And more flexible, longer term funding should help alleviate problems before they exist.

"This will allow us to provide more early intervention, meaning that we can prevent issues at an early stage, before they reach crisis point."



"We don't know where we'd have been" - one family's story

Ted* is a young father of three children, all under the age of six.

His wife is unable to work because of ill health, and as such he is the main carer in his family.

Ted has had to stop working, which has caused very severe financial hardship. The accumulation of high energy bill debts has further worsened the family's position.

Fortunately, East Kilbride Citizens Advice Bureau was able to provide valuable advice via the Money Talks + service in order to:

Adjust his Universal Credit claim, to reflect he was now the main carer for everyone in his home - and so was unable to work

Apply for a South Lanarkshire Council wellbeing grant - a cash payment of £250 to assist with the cost of living crisis

Help Ted's wife to re-apply for an Adult Disability Payment after initially being reduced

Make an application to the Energy Trust to request a debt write off. This was approved, clearing £2,149

It's this type of support that is at risk, threatening the future for families like Ted's.



£25

Hamilton CAB generated £25 for every £1 of South Lanarkshire Council funding given - up from £16 the previous year

+10%

3,963 people received advice from Hamilton CAB in 2023

Hamilton Citizens Advice Bureau is one of four in each of the localities in South Lanarkshire.

A good home life for everyone

Many different organisations are working to enable people and families to live the life they want, across South Lanarkshire, despite the challenges.

Social determinants like a good home are considered to be critically important to someone's overall life chances.

Many of our third sector organisations are offering vital support to people.

COVEY provides 1-1 and group-based befriending, mentoring and family support.

Jacqueline is a single parent of four children. She had experienced bereavement, alcohol and substance use and was struggling with debt. Experiencing extremely poor mental health, Jacqueline had started to have thoughts of suicide.

COVEY supported her to build her confidence, in particular with her parenting - which she wanted to improve.

Showing the value of networks and partnerships, COVEY referred her to the local Citizens Advice Bureau who helped her with debt and benefit payment issues.

Jacqueline feels she has grown in confidence and self-esteem, and now feels the future is bright for her and her family.

These sorts of interventions are crucial, because not only do they help people move forward in their lives, but they prevent considerably worse outcomes for everyone concerned.



Holiday hunger is something often written about nowadays, particularly when we consider just how many food banks operate in South Lanarkshire.

To meet this growing need, **Blantyre Community Trust** provides meals for young people during school holidays, but their approach is subtle, and hopefully leads to less stigma.

Last year they opened up a new community garden and ran a plant to plate workshop, where kids and adults came together to grow fruit and veg.

This was very successful in various ways. Kids got to learn about growing and caring for plants, adults used it as a quiet space to grow mentally

as well as literally growing the food.

There's so much more, too! **Care and Repair Lanarkshire's** initiatives, focused on ensuring that elderly and disabled people can live safely in their homes, underscoring the need for home-based support services.

Over at **Grow 73** in Rutherglen, they support people's health and wellbeing through their community garden and plant-based activities and services.

Waist Not Want Not is a community shop in East Kilbride which offers a clothing swap initiative - as well as low cost toys, books, and baby goods.

Lanarkshire Carers works with 3,299 carers to develop and deliver services that make a positive difference to their lives.

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The number of different food banks in South Lanarkshire, according to South Lanarkshire Council.



St Anthony's & St Mark's Foodbank reports that they support 80 people per week, but this rises to 100 during the school holidays.

Just under 14,000 children in South Lanarkshire (22%) are living in poverty and this is increasing, according to South Lanarkshire Council's Child Poverty Action Plan Report 22-23





The beating heart of South Lanarkshire

Meet the man from Nigeria, who is bringing the spirit and passion of Africa to the lives of people in South Lanarkshire.

Heart of Africa UK is a truly unique charity.

Combining African passion and traditional Scottish community spirit it helps to address food poverty and social isolation.

In doing so, **Tuoyo Ayiku** is also helping to break down traditional cultural barriers.

The initiative sprang from a simple yet profound desire to connect with Scottish neighbours through the universal language of food.

Starting with cooking sessions at a homeless unit, Tuoyo saw firsthand the power of food in bridging divides and fostering a sense of belonging among the isolated. This foundational project in 2016 laid the groundwork for an organisation deeply intertwined with the community's heart.

"Heart of Africa UK was formed to introduce my culture to South Lanarkshire using food to promote community cohesion," Tuoyo says.

"The heart behind the Heart of Africa is to fulfil what I believe is my calling to help people."



"This lunch club ran in partnership with LDVG is there to provide a social atmosphere for our elderly in the community.

"This is about the heart to give back to our community. This is home for me now. I am Mr T of South Lanarkshire."

The impact of Heart of Africa UK stretches beyond providing meals; it knits the community closer, creating spaces where people can gather, learn, and grow together.

By joining forces with other organisations and public sector bodies, Heart of Africa UK has extended its reach.

For example, the lunch club operates in partnership with **Larkhall & District Volunteers Group**, providing meaningful support to others - something Tuoyo loves.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Heart of Africa UK delivered over 5,000 warm lunches to vulnerable individuals shielding at home.

OutLET: Play Resource uses nature-based programmes to support disadvantaged individuals, particularly those with additional support needs and/or recovering from trauma. It has launched a successful outdoor programme specifically designed to support the mental health and societal integration of asylum seekers.

Making Christmas Merry Again

Nostalgia Group delivered by **People's Past People's Future** is a Christmas Day free event for people on their own.

Last year Moira attended the event having not left the house for months. New to the area, she had not built new connections. Moira was given transport to the venue, and introduced to other people her own age who have since become friends.

She said, **"I would have been on my own and not celebrated Christmas if I had not come to the event. I had a great day and am so thankful that the community looked after socially vulnerable, less mobile people in this way."**



Field of dreams

A weekly football match is helping asylum seekers in East Kilbride feel more connected. We went to watch the game.

Thursday at 5pm can't come quick enough for Merhawi.

Crisp, clean kit and boots that fit are ready and waiting at KPark in East Kilbride.

It's time for football. Two hours in the week when the stress of coming from a far land as an asylum seeker can be forgotten.

Sure, you don't solve problems playing football, but perhaps you can help those who face the enormous challenge of settling in a new country.

The East Kilbride Integration Network (EKin) was established in December 2023. It supports vulnerable groups including asylum seekers, refugees and new migrants to enhance their quality of life.

They provide advice and support, as well as practical things like clothes, shoes and haircuts to those trying to make a new life here.

And then there's the football.

"We go together to the pitch, and they play with us," he says.

"We are so happy, seeing the pitch, it's beautiful!"

"I have great thanks for all the group members of EKin. They come and ask everything - what do you need? They don't take any time."

"They give us good advice, they give us a voice."

EKin works in partnership with East Kilbride Community Trust, which owns and operates KPark.

They even provide use of a mini bus to pick up participants to ensure they can get from their temporary accommodation to their own field of dreams.

Volunteer Fraser takes up the story.

"For two hours they forget that they don't have a home or a job, or what's going on in their own countries," he says.

"We're not doing anything magic, it's just a game of football."

"Our job is to try to get these guys into our community, to make connections so they are not left on their own, whether it be a game of football, food banks, clothes banks, meal days; to meet people, or even come to the basketball."

So why get involved? Simple: the impact.

"The thought of being able to make people happy with football - which has made me happy my whole life - was something that was too good to refuse," says Fraser.

"The most impactful thing for me is that one of the boys did get housed in a permanent residence in Glasgow."

"Last week was his final week, but when he said goodbye, you could see he was visibly sad to leave us."

"You don't realise the impact you are making with a game of football, or just having a laugh, putting an arm around the shoulder telling them they are doing well or if it is a good pass or strike."



Meet Merhawi and others who are making South Lanarkshire home



According to the most recent data, around 5,086 people seeking asylum were in receipt of support in Scotland at the end of March 2023. ScotGov: The role of local authorities in refugee integration in Scotland Report 2023

"It is uplifting to witness first-hand the growing relationship between the local town and our refugee community. The work being done by EKin is both impressive and heartening. As a nation we should be opening our arms to people from all over the world and this is precisely what we are seeing with the work of the East Kilbride Integration Network."

Colette Stevenson MSP





“Without this, the kids might not have a future” – Nicole

Meet Nicole, an inspirational woman who has carved out a full time career in sport, helping to change other people's lives.

Every week Blantyre Soccer Academy welcomes 600 players, guided by 100 different coaches.

Their motto is to “build a better Blantyre, one person at a time.”

Perhaps **Nicole Martin** is the best reflection of that, having spent more than a decade being part of the charity building a successful career working in administration.

During that time she helped establish a para football programme, with the added benefit of winning three national titles.

Chair Jimmy Whelan describes her as “inspiring” and “an example to all of us at the academy.”

As a college student she undertook a regular volunteering slot.

“On a Friday we would turn up at half four until six o’ clock and take all the young kids so that’s how I ended up starting at Blantyre Soccer ACademy,” she remembers.

“And I’ve never looked back.”

Nicole has been supported to undertake a wide range of coaching qualifications with the Scottish FA, including para sport.

She acknowledges that winning is fun, but stresses that it’s about far more than that.

“We’ve got a young boy who was 13 when he joined,” Nicole explains.

“He’s now 18, and in a care home. He comes to our disability sessions. Without saying too much, he’s not had the best of lives. The only person he will come and open up to is myself. That’s rewarding.

“We have another boy in our para team who didn’t want to do anything. [But] he went to college, a bit like myself, and he’s now coaching with the younger ones. He’s now pushing himself for a career in sport.”

It’s clear that Nicole is passionate about creating opportunities for young people. She sees Blantyre Soccer Academy is an ideal place to encourage others.

“Don’t go out and look for a job first thing, go out and volunteer,” she encourages.

“Go out and do what you like doing. See if you like it, and build it that way.”

Good advice, but with so much risk hanging over the third sector what if the opportunities Nicole experienced are not available to others?

“Please don’t shut these areas,” she says.

“Without these places there’s nowhere for these kids to go. If there’s nowhere for these kids to go then it’s going to be a hectic ride for them as they are going to go out and cause crime.

“Without sport a lot of people don’t have anything. Without this, the kids might not have a future.”

We should listen to Nicole. And listen well.

45

Blantyre Soccer Academy’s oldest para player is 45-years-old



Skill builders

Education and employment support in South Lanarkshire.

The route from poverty to prosperity will always come via education and employment.

Everyone deserves the opportunity to find a good job that is fairly paid, with an appropriate level of security.

Many organisations across the third sector in South Lanarkshire are playing their part.

Of people aged 16 to 64 years living in South Lanarkshire, 78.3% were employed in the year ending September 2023. This is a slight decrease compared with the year ending September 2022 when the local rate was 78.7%. (Data taken from ONS)

Skills Exchange East Kilbride offers skill-sharing and professional development programmes, directly responding to the community’s evolving needs and aligning perfectly with our campaign’s ‘ask’ to recognise our value.

Through facilitating workshops and mentorship, they not only equip individuals with necessary skills but also foster a culture of lifelong learning and adaptability essential for the modern workforce.



The third sector is often good at helping people towards a better future in education and employment, by equipping them with essential life skills such as empathy and care.

The outdoor learning centre **Wiston Lodge** exemplifies this. Young people regularly come to participate in their programmes and are so positively influenced by it that they stay on to volunteer and/or work there after they have ‘aged-out’.

Young people like Rowan, remember spending his childhood at Wiston’s summer activity programmes, while his mum was working. Now he is a qualified activity instructor, working on the same programme that he enjoyed as a child.

Rowan explains why he has chosen this as a career: “It’s a really rewarding job - it’s nice coming in every day and helping to make young people’s lives better if I can.”

Nurture @ Academy’s mission is to empower young people to be confident and skilled for joining the workforce and gaining employment.

They offer short courses in basic hairdressing and employability, practically trying to get young people to think about working in the hair and beauty industry.

Routes towards prosperity



Kitted out

Dress for Success Scotland is a charity that empowers women to achieve economic independence by providing professional clothing and a network of support.



Care for the kids

Childcare in the Community provides nursery, out of school care and mobile creche services in various venues across Hamilton.



Empowering business

East Kilbride Collective is a community-driven social enterprise which seeks to empower local businesses by removing barriers and fostering collaboration.



Education & Employment 1,252 services

But it’s about more than that. The organisation provides a safe space for vulnerable people, because from there, they can feel empowered to make a positive change in their life.

The Machan Trust is a charity based in Larkhall that provides vital early intervention and employability activities, such as their Children’s University programme.

Meanwhile, **The Dollywood Foundation** works with eight groups across South Lanarkshire to provide books for children through the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. To date, they have gifted 13,765 books to children in South Lanarkshire.



Fencing at Wiston Lodge

Staging a career

Three years ago Kai Bruce joined the **Hamilton District Youth Theatre**. Since then he’s flourished as a performer, taking on the lead in last year’s show, Nativity the Musical. Kai has learned the importance of teamwork, appropriate communication and made new friends. His confidence has soared, and now he’s pursuing further education in musical theatre. Go Kai!

Public sector partnerships: A tale of two outcomes

Why stronger collaboration with the public sector really matters.

Organisations such as Larkhall & District Volunteer Group (LDVG) and Healthy Valleys, offer tailored, empathetic services designed around the unique requirements of their communities.

The interaction between these third sector organisations and public sector bodies is often complex.

Such experiences underscore the importance of a better public-third sector working relationship for the betterment of South Lanarkshire's communities.



Larkhall & District Volunteer Group: Navigating the challenges

LDVG's experience with public sector collaboration has been a mixed bag, with notable successes tempered by significant obstacles.

Sandra McCrory reflects on the early promise shown in their free community car service initiative, which exemplified productive cooperation with NHS Lanarkshire.

Such projects are vitally important in tackling health inequalities.

This project demonstrated a commendable instance of third and public sector partnership, where mutual goals aligned perfectly to serve the community's needs, however things then went awry.

"Our free community car service started as an excellent example of co-working with the public sector," she says.

"Unfortunately, the conversation around Community Transport hubs stalled and then stopped completely," Sandra says, highlighting the precarious nature of such partnerships.

The cessation of support for the community car project after Covid-19, was down to a combination of funding depletion, which was not helped by a high turnover of public sector staff working on the project.

This exemplifies a recurring challenge faced by third sector organisations: the sustainability of pilot projects initiated in partnership with public bodies being continued despite clear successes.

Healthy Valleys: A positive model of collaboration

In contrast, Healthy Valleys showcases a more favourable outcome of public-third sector co-working.

With a history of working alongside South Lanarkshire Council and NHS Lanarkshire, the charity has managed to embed itself as a cornerstone of community health initiatives in the Clydesdale locality.

One such programme is called Resilient Families, which supports women through pregnancy and families with children under 5; delivering intensive 1:1 support and a range of educational parenting programmes.

Lesley McCranor highlights the effectiveness of such collaborations. She says: "Through the years, we have formed trusting and reputable relationships with many public sector colleagues.

"Our hard work continues to be recognised and acknowledged from those in leadership roles to those delivering services alongside Healthy Valleys staff and volunteers."

This positive engagement is not without its challenges, however, as Lesley notes the need for earlier inclusion of third sector organisations in strategic planning, to maximise the impact and efficiency of community services.



"Resilient Families is an amazing programme of work that has a huge impact on families and communities. We are very grateful for all the work Healthy Valleys do and their continued partnership."

NHS Lanarkshire's Maternal & Infant Nutrition Lead

Co-working at its best

Leadhills Community Company (LCCL) took on the task of planting 840 trees to transform estate land near the rural village of Leadhills.

Following advice from VASLan, LCCL contacted Clydesdale Community Initiatives and Lowther Men's Shed for help with this project.

Together, with the local primary school (all staff and pupils), as well as volunteers from the village, they created a new woodland space in rural South Lanarkshire in just one afternoon!



Connecting people and protecting communities

Third sector organisations across South Lanarkshire are able to drive change in their communities because they know their people best.

Communities creating place-based change is an important way to put power back into the hands of local people. There are some incredible examples across South Lanarkshire.

One organisation called **Community Links** does what it says on the tin.

Their hubs create space where people can come together for connection and support. Whether it's assistance with education, employment, housing, or health and wellbeing, these services help people navigate often complex systems.

In doing so, they help to create long-lasting community-owned change.

Carnwath Community Council's Town Centre Transformation Project illustrates the power of community-led initiatives in revitalising tired and disused local spaces for the collective benefit.

So far, they have received over £1m in grant funding to develop the town centre and have already opened The Wee White Crow Circular Economy Hub, which is a shop owned by the community and is generating income for the community.

WATIF is a community development trust in rural Clydesdale. As we launch this report, they are launching a new project to provide eight e-bikes for use by residents, including people who are disabled.

Meanwhile **Voice Design & Print** provide free or heavily subsidised print and media services for South Lanarkshire charities.



Connected Communities
1,960 services

In the heart of communities

The **Gillespie Centre** is a community cafe and hub for a variety of (mainly) third sector organisations to use.

Rain or Shine provides free children's clothing, books, toys, and essentials to local families. They partner with food banks, healthcare providers, schools and churches to support the most vulnerable households.

Their Rutherglen community shop sells second hand children's items to raise funds, reducing our reliance on external funding and reducing waste.

The **Church at the Cross** is a small fellowship with a big vision for growth in the town of Larkhall. Their vision for the community brought about the creation of **Larkhall Community Growers**.

Rutherglen Bankhead Residents Association represent the needs of the community to all and promote the physical and mental health of members through a variety of activities.

The Salvation Army operates charity shops and clothing collections across South Lanarkshire.



According to the latest data from OSCR's Sector Overview Report (Nov 23), over 40% of Scottish charities operate locally in a specific place, community or neighbourhood. A further 25% operate within one local authority area.

Finding purpose

Yvonne tells about her experiences with Clydesdale Community Initiatives, where she's been able to find real purpose in her life.

Clydesdale Community Initiatives (CCI) supports people to contribute to their community.

Whilst their participants face a range of challenges such as health, disability and social circumstances, the charity's focus is always on their strengths and interests.

Langloch Farm is the primary social enterprise for CCI. It's a magical place where people are able to be the best version of themselves.

This isn't about service delivery, but about giving people an opportunity for them to make a contribution. In doing so, they grow confident and more able to tackle the challenges they face in their lives.

Yvonne is the most amazing example of that. She moved to the area, having experienced homelessness on three occasions following failed marriages.

She had spent many years caring for her parents, both of whom are now gone.

"When my mum and dad passed away I had no purpose. That was really, really hard."

When she moved to the area she initially got involved with another South Lanarkshire organisation Happy Valleys who eventually referred Yvonne to CCI.

She explains: **"The gardening came up on a Monday and I thought, 'I'm in!'."**

"We planted the seeds a few weeks ago, getting ready for summer. We give the vegetables and produce to the kitchen. They make soups and bits and pieces."

"The herbs go to the botanics. They'll come and harvest some of them for their soaps and balms."

"You're out there, you've grown and cared for the stuff, then you see the stuff being produced and sold - or made into food; everything on the doorstep."

As is so often the case, this is about far more than horticulture, though. With the skills Yvonne has developed she's now mentoring others.

"There are other incentives," she says.
"You are not only learning new things, but you are meeting new people."
"I've got involved and become a mentor and I am now helping one of the volunteers. I'm mentoring him and helping him."
"You get to learn so many skills, not just in a physical sense but in a mental sense as well., You have meaning and purpose and that's what it's all about. We have an amazing community."

Yvonne has experienced a lot in her life, but it's clear from talking to her that her new world has given her energy, enthusiasm and excitement for the future.

"CCI has completely impacted my life," she smiles.
"I never went over the door. I wouldn't see anyone from one week's end to another. Now I am part of a community. I've met lots of new friends. It's a different person you are seeing here. People wouldn't believe it!"
"If CCI disappeared tonight, it would be a big loss to the community - and me. I don't know where I would be after. That's the beauty of a place like this, you become a community and you help each other. If this is gone, then there's a big hole in this community."

Rural challenges

Niall McShannon who leads CCI reflects on the challenges faced by a rural organisation.

CCI supports people to make a contribution to their community.

There are, however, a number of challenges of running what we call an asset based social enterprise.

As a social enterprise, the biggest challenge is that the contribution has to be really worthwhile. It has to be meaningful, but to have value to other people.

That's a real challenge when you are working with people who have complex support needs, and require significant levels of support in order to be able to contribute.

That is exacerbated when you are in a rural area with issues around transport and isolation, in terms of how to get people significant distances.

We also have issues around strategic relevance. The centre of decision making tends to be in the more urban areas of South Lanarkshire. It can feel like you are on the periphery.

There are wider issues too, in that we find there's an issue in terms of being valued, being seen. We have wonderful relationships with front line workers, and many of our colleagues come and see what we do and the impact that we have on individual lives. But it does feel that being valued within the really big organisations is a problem.

Equally, it doesn't feel like we have an input into the strategic challenges our communities are facing. Challenges like isolation, depression, or mental health.

It does not feel like we are part of that discussion, or that anyone is interested in finding out what our experiences are - or those of the people we work with.

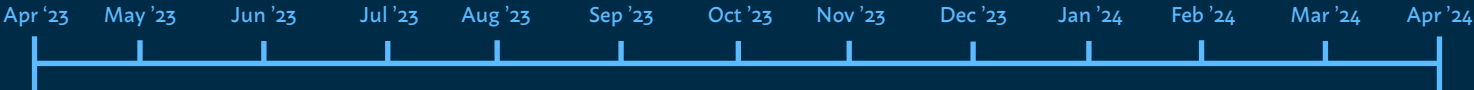
Another challenge is the security around funding. Whilst we are a social enterprise, and generate around 50% of our income from sales, the rest is from trusts, grants and donations. It consumes a vast amount of energy and creates a huge amount of uncertainty.



Find out how Yvonne has found purpose since moving to South Lanarkshire

VASLan 2023/24 in numbers

Our core functions as a TSI are to build capacity, be a source of knowledge, facilitate voices from across the sector, and connect partners.



Over the past 12 months we have reprioritised volunteering, been more proactively delivering our capacity building supports, accelerated partnership and collaborating working, supported sector growth and sustainability, and raised the visibility of the sector locally.

136

volunteer involving organisations supported to promote their volunteering opportunities

52

volunteer involving organisations being supported to obtain quality standards in volunteer management best practice

728

people supported to access volunteering opportunities

115

volunteers supported as part of their employability journey

33

events held to actively promote Saltire Awards

19,687

hours of Saltire Awards volunteering in South Lanarkshire

1,420

third sector organisations operating in South Lanarkshire

485

active member organisations regularly accessing support and advice

2,600+

capacity building interactions

360

people promptly, safely and supported home from hospital through a volunteer-led provision linking to community supports

61

organisations supported with enterprising activity

506

groups supported with the set up and ongoing running of an organisation

210

organisations supported with funding and fundraising advice

£2,302,822.56

of funding directly distributed with 124 awards to local grassroots organisations in the last 12 months across the Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund, Integrated Care Fund, Employability and Multiply Funds

8

Thematic Network events to improve collaborative working across Social Enterprise, Employability, and New Scots Integration

816

people affected by cancer supported with financial, emotional and practical non-clinical supports via the Macmillan Improving the Cancer Journey provision

15

Locality Network events facilitated by local third sector partners with 600+ attendees provided a platform to share best practice, access peer support, amplify sector voices and raise the profile of vital work being delivered in our communities

140

nominations across 7 categories for our Third Sector Awards to recognise and celebrate our community champions

100+

organisational spotlight videos on our YouTube channel to raise the visibility of local organisations

252

Locator App initial downloads accessing an online resource to search for available third sector services in South Lanarkshire

“

This co-produced campaign is just the start of real change in South Lanarkshire”

– Steven Sweeney

VASLan’s CEO Steven Sweeney reflects on our Keep The Beat Alive and shares his commitment to challenge for change.

Thank you to every volunteer, community organisation, charity, social enterprise, trustee or committee member for playing your part in this campaign. Keep making the magic happen in your own wee patch of the world, keep the heartbeat alive in our communities.

This co-produced campaign is just the start of real change in South Lanarkshire; please take hope from the fact that you are part of a collective movement - this is the start of something special.

To reiterate, the aim of this campaign is to influence local, but especially national, policy shapers and decision makers on just how vital the third sector is to our South Lanarkshire communities. It’s not just about surviving, but thriving.

Our three ‘asks’ are for our value to be recognised, for smarter funding, and for meaningful engagement. Locally, but especially nationally.

In its current fashion, facilitating the range of voices across the sector isn’t influencing policy shapers and decision makers - it’s just not cutting it. We at VASLan need to move to becoming more of a campaigning organisation on behalf of the third sector and that is why we have commissioned this pivotal piece of work.

VASLan has recently launched a new strategy; ‘ENABLING. FACILITATING. CHAMPIONING’:

We want to enable as many members as possible to achieve their vision and mission

We want to facilitate a best practice single point of access for support and advice

We want to champion the value and impact of the third sector locally

Our vision is: **‘Resilient and enabled communities creating a stronger, fairer and more equitable South Lanarkshire with volunteers, community organisations and Social Enterprises at its heart.’**

Moving forward, we intend to co-produce campaigns with you on an ongoing basis, until this vision is realised.

Together, let’s keep the beat alive.



Thank you to all the organisations who contributed to our Keep The Beat Alive Impact Report:

Agape Wellbeing - Asthma and Allergy Foundation - Blantyre Community Trust - Blantyre Soccer Academy - Bothwell and Uddingston Men's shed - Care and Repair Lanarkshire - Carnwath Community Council - Carstairs Thistle afc - Chatty Crafters - Childcare in the Community - Climate Action Strathaven - Clydesdale Community Activities Group - Clydesdale Community Initiatives - Clydesdale Netball Club - Collective Communities CIC T/A EK Collective - Come Paint With Us Art & Crafts - Community Links - COVEY - Darcy's Equine Assisted Learning Centre CIC - Dress for Success Scotland - East Kilbride Citizens Advice Bureau - East Kilbride Integration Network (EKin) - East Kilbride Youth Disability Sports Club (EKYDSC) - Farmigos CIC - Forth Community Resource Centre - Gillespie Centre - Grow 73 - Hamilton Citizens Advice Bureau - Hamilton District Youth Theatre - Hamilton Judo Club Inclusion - Healthy & Active in East Kilbride - Healthy Valleys - Heart of Africa UK - Keep The Heid - Kilbryde Hospice - Lanark Thistle Bowling Club - Lanarkshire Association for Mental Health (LAMH) - Lanarkshire Carers - Larkhall & District Volunteer Group (LDVG) - Larkhall Community Growers - Leadhills Community Company Ltd - Let's Talk FAB - MorphFit Gentle Movement Project - Nurture @ Academy - OutLET: Play Resource - Parkinsons UK: Lanarkshire and Glasgow South - People's Past People's Future - R:evolve Recycle - Rain or Shine South Lanarkshire - Reach Out Community Wellbeing & Support - Rutherglen Bankhead Residents Association - Salvation Army Trading Company Ltd - Samaritans of Lanarkshire - Skills Exchange - Smile Children's Charity - St Anthony's and St Mark's Foodbank - St Athanasius Community Hall Management Group - Stonehouse Jubilee Club - Talk Now - The Church At The Cross - The Dollywood Foundation - The Machan Trust - U3A in East Kilbride - Voice Design & Print - Waist Not Want Not - WATIF - Wiston Lodge - Women's Aid: South Lanarkshire and East Renfrewshire



keepthebeatalive.org.uk

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