

Improving Lives
2025-2026

Annual Impact Report



Everyone deserves a place to *turn to*

Improving Lives are a small charity based in Clydebank, covering the whole of West Dunbartonshire and beyond. We offer a safe and informative space for people living with disabilities, their family or carers.

We provide one to one advice and personalised support plans to allow and assist people to make improvements to their lives in whatever way they identify as important to them. This can be getting out of the house for the first time in years, attending support or activity groups, getting into education or employment, help filling in a form or assistance in applying for a blue badge or bus pass.

From our hub we also run several support groups such as autism peer support, Art for Anxiety and men's fishing group. All of our groups focus on building confidence, growing relationships and building on strengths. Our work with people is ongoing for as long as they need us and we know that there are often multiple issues people would like to address.



"Living with several disabilities and long term conditions myself has given me an insight in to the same struggles."

Kevin Crawford – Charity Coordinator and Founder



“The reality for many people in our community is trying to find the right support the first time. Many do not know who to contact, or are put on extremely long waiting lists.

Living with several disabilities and long-term conditions myself has given me insight into the same struggles in the past. This is why I wanted to create a service with easy access that would provide the right support the first time and prevent people from waiting on lists for weeks or months.

We provide support for people with any disability or long-term condition across all age groups. Our aim is to help people get the right support the first time, delivered by people with lived experience who have an understanding of the daily struggles people in our community go through.”

Kevin Crawford

Making an Impact



**We've taken
2318 incoming
calls**

**Hub Groups
Attendance
3873**

**644
Advisor
Appointments**

**Our Improving
Lives Hub seen
941 walk through
our doors for
assistance**

**We helped
5997 people
in the last year**

**363 people
returning
for help**

**298 people
accessed help
for benefits**

**Over 50
Outreach
Stalls
& Events**

**Social Media
Reach
135, 067**

Support and Advice



Our advisors offer one to one support and can create personalised plans for our clients which document their issues, how to resolve these, their needs and goals and how these can be achieved. Our advisors have a great knowledge of existing supports and services for referring clients to and are always updating this.

We also have thousands of contacts in our database for various new hobbies, groups and organisations in West Dunbartonshire and beyond. We can even help to introduce clients to new groups or other organisations for the first time to make those first steps a little easier.

This year our advisors had 644 one-to-one appointments, helping our clients with various different issues from helping to apply for housing and blue badges to putting together full support plans and putting several supports in place.



Support and Advice

We were proud to host West Dunbartonshire's largest information and advice event once again this year, holding our Big Disability Open Day for the ninth year running. The event brought together 56 local groups, organisations and agencies, all sharing information about the services and support available across the area. Over 250 members of the public attended on the day to speak directly with providers and find out what help is available.

This was our second year hosting the event at Dalmuir Barclay Church, which has worked well as a welcoming and accessible venue. Plans are already in place for our tenth Open Day, which will take place there in April.



Information and Awareness



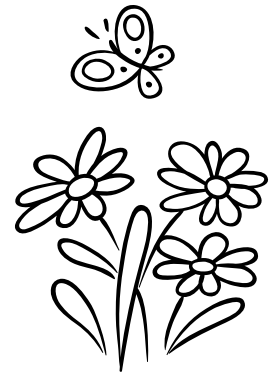
During the past year we made a conscious effort to take our information stall out into the community and attend a wide range of partner events. Being present at these events allowed us to meet people who may never have walked through our door or known where to turn for help. Many people we spoke to had heard of Improving Lives but were unsure what support we offer, while others were hearing about the charity for the first time.

Outreach work like this is an important part of what we do. Not everyone feels comfortable approaching services, and many people living with disability, long-term conditions or caring responsibilities can become isolated from sources of information and support. By meeting people in community spaces, local events and partner activities, we can start conversations in a relaxed way and help people understand what support is available.

These conversations often lead to people getting advice, joining groups, or connecting with other services which improve their wellbeing. Outreach also helps us build stronger relationships with other organisations across West Dunbartonshire, making it easier to work together and ensure people find the right support when they need it.



Sensory Garden Launched



This year we were able to launch our new Sensory Garden and Wellbeing Allotment.

Our Sensory Garden has been carefully designed to accommodate people with various disabilities, ensuring that everyone can take part in gardening activities. Raised beds make planting easier for wheelchair users and people unable to bend low. Wide, even pathways ensure smooth navigation and shaded seating areas provide a place to rest and enjoy the surroundings. Visitors will be able to enjoy the calming scent of lavender and rosemary, feel the texture of different plants, and listen to the soothing sounds of wind chimes.

Many of our peer support groups such as Art for Anxiety and our Autism Support Group use the tranquil outdoor space.

Our sensory garden is available for individuals or families of children with disabilities who may wish to spend a little quiet time in the outdoors. It may be especially useful for families without a garden of their own or who just need a little breathing space. This can be booked direct with ourselves and is completely free.



The Sensory Garden and Wellbeing Allotment have been a labour of love and a lot of work to create. This work would not have been possible without the months of work by staff and volunteers and of course funding from the amazing Corra Foundation.



We currently work with an animal therapy CIC (Patchwork Ponies) who bring ponies to the allotment space to combine the benefits of time with animals to the calming atmosphere of our sensory garden.



We have been able to use the spaces to run our Flourish Together project. This project offers a holistic approach to wellbeing. It supports mental, emotional, and physical health while providing opportunities for learning and social interaction in an inclusive, supportive outdoor environment. It is designed to be a wonderful way to engage people and help them build confidence, new abilities, and connections with others.

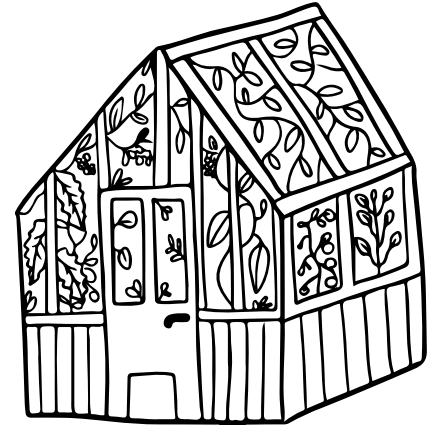


It also leads to increased community building due to the natural social interactions, intergenerational connections and shared pride and collective ownership of the space. More long-term benefits are skills development through gardening knowledge and practical skills, increased sustainability skills and building on people's creative and practical problem-solving abilities.

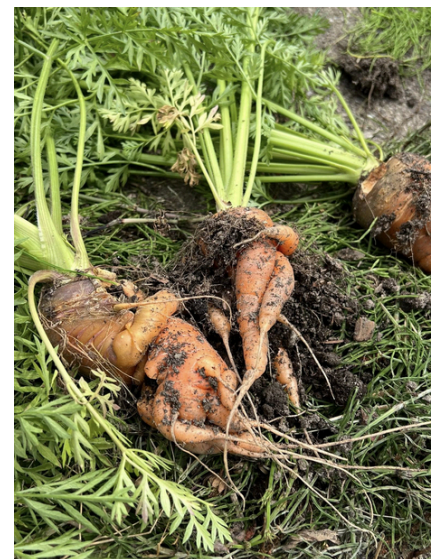
Wellbeing Allotment Launched

Our wellbeing allotment was launched this year and has quickly become an important part of our work. The space was developed as a practical community growing area where people can spend time outdoors, learn basic food growing skills and take part in something shared. From the start the focus was on creating a simple working allotment where volunteers and group members could be involved in shaping the space and deciding what to grow through the seasons. Early crops have included potatoes, onions, lettuce and herbs, giving people the chance to experience the full process of planting, tending and harvesting food for the first time.

The produce grown on the allotment is shared among the people who help grow it and used within group activities, helping create a sense of collective ownership and pride in the space. Alongside the growing work we have also delivered Flourish Together workshops on the allotment, small group sessions which bring people together through hands-on gardening and outdoor wellbeing activities. These sessions offer a relaxed way for people to build confidence, connect with others and spend time in a supportive environment. The development of the sensory garden, allotment and delivery of the Flourish Together workshops has been supported through funding from Corra Foundation's FlightPath Fund, which has allowed us to establish the space and begin building a programme of regular activity around it.



"I am proud to be a part of the Improving Lives allotment team. It's great to see what we have built. It has really helped with my mental health and given me something else to live for. Thanks again to Improving Lives."

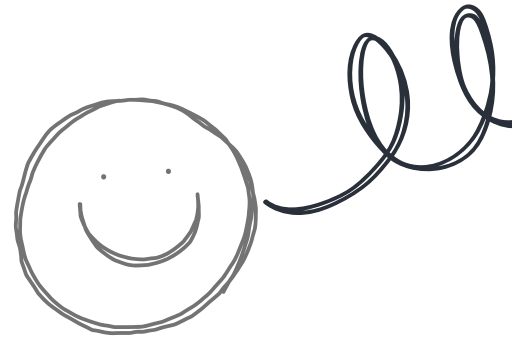


GLASGOW AIRPORT'S
FLIGHTPATH
PROUD TO SUPPORT OUR COMMUNITIES



CORRA
FOUNDATION
voice • power • change

Art for Anxiety Kids



Art has the power to quiet the mind, reduce stress, improve our mood and boost self esteem – and our Art for Anxiety group does that every Tuesday. That's why we wanted to run a kids version of the group over the summer holidays to create a quiet space for children to enjoy being creative – as an oasis of calm in the middle of the busy holidays – and we seen some amazing artwork and creations being made over the 4 sessions!

We would like to thank all the kids who came along to give our art sessions a try.



Pony Care Animal Therapy

Animal therapy offers a range of emotional, social, and developmental benefits for children and young people. Interacting with animals can reduce stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation, while also promoting confidence, empathy, and emotional regulation. In particular, spending time with ponies can be especially powerful. The gentle, non-judgemental nature of ponies helps children feel safe and accepted, which can be especially beneficial for those who have experienced trauma or struggle with communication. Grooming, leading, and simply being around ponies encourages responsibility, patience, and a sense of calm, while the bond that forms between child and animal can boost self-esteem and foster meaningful emotional connections.

The young people who took part in our summer pony sessions were –

Unaccompanied young people who had arrived in the UK through the National Transfer Scheme.
From disadvantaged families
Children in kinship care



History Unlocked



Another project we are particularly proud of this year is our collaborative project with the wonderful Clydesiders.

Over the past year we have been working with them to explore our building's links to activism through their community activism heritage project.

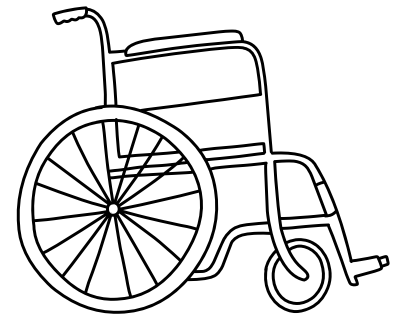
As part of their National Lottery Heritage Fund project we uncovered some fascinating stories from the newspaper archives about our building on Dumbarton Road when it used to be a police station, and in later years when it was home to the Independent Resource Centre.

It was interesting to hear stories of activism, including rent strikes and everyday resistance, often not fully recorded in formal or official heritage records and to look at how power has been used historically in the town and where it sits now and how things have changed or still need to.

We are looking forward to showcasing our findings in a booklet put together by the group and an open day as part of the new West Dunbartonshire Heritage Festival in May 2026.



Self Directed Support

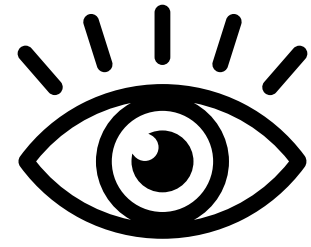


Our Self Directed Support (SDS) service continues to provide advice and guidance to people who are navigating social care and support options across West Dunbartonshire. The team supports individuals and families to understand SDS, explore their choices and feel more confident managing their own support arrangements. This can include help with understanding the different SDS options, advice on becoming an employer, and guidance for people who choose to recruit their own Personal Assistants. The service focuses on clear information, practical support and helping people feel less overwhelmed by systems which can often feel complicated.

One of the highlights of the year was our Personal Assistant Information Day held at Dalmuir CE Centre. The event created an opportunity for people interested in the role of Personal Assistant to come along, ask questions and learn more about what the job involves. Our SDS team enjoyed meeting visitors and speaking about the challenging but rewarding nature of the role. The day also brought together partner organisations who were able to offer advice to people considering employment in care roles. We were pleased to welcome Susie and Stephen, Employment Advisors from the DWP, along with Joanne, Employment Development Coordinator from The Salvation Army, who shared their expertise and guidance with attendees. The event helped raise awareness of Personal Assistant roles locally and strengthened connections between people seeking work and those looking for support.



Sight Loss Support



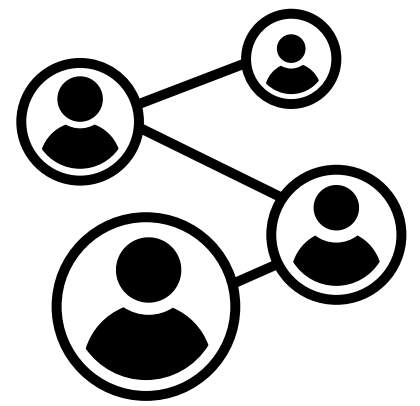
We would also like to highlight our Sight Loss Support Group which runs monthly in Dumbarton. This group allows people affected by sight loss to meet others with shared experience and stay socially connected.

Members support each other, share practical ideas, and spend time together in a relaxed setting. The group helps people stay informed about local services and support while maintaining independence in everyday life.

Activities sit at the centre of the group. During the year, members took part in a canal barge day trip, tried bocchia, and came together for an annual Christmas lunch, creating regular opportunities for connection, enjoyment, and shared experience.



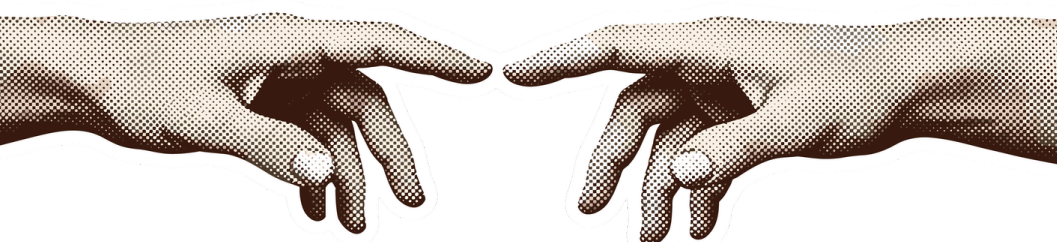
All about Connection



Strong human connection sits at the heart of wellbeing. Many people who come to Improving Lives feel isolated or struggle to find spaces where they feel understood. Our community groups create places where people meet others who share similar experiences, interests, or challenges. During the year we ran regular activities including the Daytime Disco, Art for Anxiety, Karate, the Men's Fishing Group, and our Autism support group. Each group offers a relaxed space for people to talk, build friendships, and take part in shared activities.

This year we also launched two new groups in response to local demand, an ADHD group and a Men's Talking Group. Feedback from participants shows how much these spaces matter, with many people saying the groups help them feel less alone and more connected to their community.

Groups like these often start with a shared activity, but they grow into something more. People check in on each other, swap advice, and offer support when someone is having a difficult time. For many, the friendships formed through these groups become an important part of everyday life.



Hear from the *Experts*

What matters most is the feedback we receive from the people who use our service. Here are just some of the feedback we have received over the last year.

“If I had not gone to Improving Lives my situation would be completely different and I would not be here”

“Lifesavers”

Thank you so much for your help. I was so worried about my situation but you have set my mind at rest.

You have done us proud

So helpful and I know that I can come in for advice - takes the stress off my shoulders

Thank you for all your help, I can sleep tonight

“If I had not gone to Improving Lives my situation would be completely different and I would not be here”

“The help I received was brilliant and I’ve told everyone I know to contact you.”

Thanks for all your support and help.

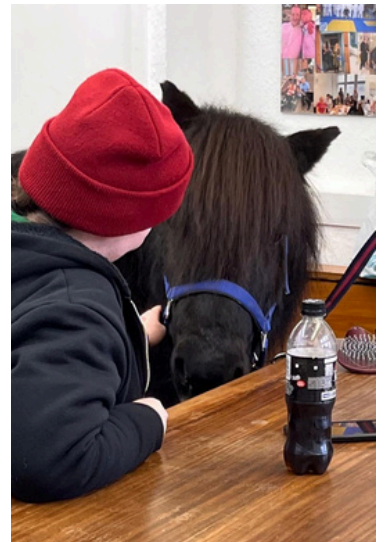
I would not have got that help anywhere else. Can’t believe what you have done for me and my family

Working with other Charities



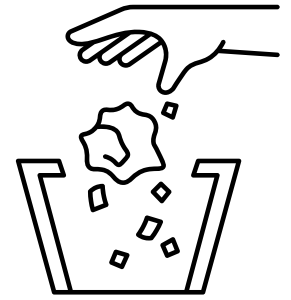
Our men's fishing group enjoy sharing their skills and experience with other groups and charities. During the year the group spent a day in Bute supporting the staff and young people of Achievement Bute to learn how to fish. The visit gave the young people a chance to try something new in a relaxed setting and spend time outdoors. The group were proud to pass on their knowledge and help others build confidence around the water.

During the year we also worked closely with Patchwork Ponies CIC to provide therapeutic animal sessions for people accessing our services. The ponies visited a number of our activities, including our Art for Anxiety classes and sessions in the sensory garden, where participants had the chance to spend calm and relaxed time interacting with the animals. We also arranged one to one sessions for individuals who would benefit from more focused support. These visits were always warmly received and offered a different kind of therapeutic experience, helping people feel at ease, build confidence and enjoy meaningful moments of connection.



Our men's fishing group were invited along to the Hamiltonhill Claypits Local Nature Reserve for a guided tour and to lend a hand before relaxing with some fishing. The Claypits, Glasgow's only inner-city nature reserve, sits alongside the Forth and Clyde Canal and offers a remarkable stretch of parkland with wide views, rich wildlife and a peaceful place to unwind. The visit gave the group a chance to meet another organisation, learn a few new skills and spend time in a different outdoor environment. It was also a great opportunity for the group to represent Improving Lives and build new connections beyond our local area.

A part of the Community



When grass cutting in the local area was reduced by the local authority, our staff and volunteers stepped in to help keep shared spaces tidy. The team spent time cutting grass and clearing overgrown areas so local residents could continue to enjoy clean and usable outdoor spaces. This was hard physical work, often carried out in spare time alongside their usual roles. Their efforts showed a strong sense of pride in the local area and a willingness to support the community when services were reduced.

Their efforts helped ensure shared spaces stayed safe, welcoming and well used by the local community.

Staff and volunteers also took part in community litter picks across the local area when the opportunity arose. These efforts included clearing rubbish from streets, canal paths and other shared spaces used by local residents. The work involved getting hands on and spending time outdoors collecting and safely disposing of waste which had built up in these areas. Small actions like this help improve the local environment and make these spaces more pleasant for people who live nearby or pass through them every day.



Staff and Volunteer Development

We place a strong value on the development of our staff and volunteers. The work we do relies on people who are confident, knowledgeable and well supported in their roles, so we encourage ongoing learning and training wherever possible. Throughout the year staff and volunteers have taken part in a range of training opportunities to strengthen their skills, improve their understanding of the issues affecting the people we support and build confidence in their roles. By supporting staff and volunteers to learn and develop, we help ensure the charity continues to deliver safe, informed and high quality support within the community.



Our staff and volunteers took part in an afternoon of HeartStart training.

This training involves learning basic emergency life support skills, including how to recognise a cardiac arrest, perform CPR, and use defibrillators.



We have a member of staff currently undertaking the Community Brokerage Award with the hope of further strengthening the advice and guidance we offer through our SDS service.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to take this opportunity to offer our most sincere thanks to our funders, who have supported us throughout the year. This has meant the world to us, as it has been instrumental in helping us to continue with the work that we do.



We would not be able to help as many people as we do without the partnerships we have created with some wonderful agencies such as Voiceability, Advice Direct Scotland, WD Citizens Advice Bureau, Kugatsu Karate, Antonine Sports Centre, West Dunbartonshire Health and Social Care Partnership, Weekday WOW Factor, Patchwork Ponies and Clydesider.



As always we would like to thank all of our supporters who have given donations, sponsored events or attended fundraisers throughout the year.



We'd like to say a massive THANK YOU to John Duncan who took on a massive challenge to raise money for Improving Lives. John completed the Highland Fling, a 53 mile Ultra Trail Marathon through Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, raising £1500! Thank you so much John! 🏃‍♂️ What an accomplishment!

We'd like to thank all our supporters for their *generous support*



We would like to thank everyone who has supported Improving Lives over the past year. Our work would not be possible without the kindness, encouragement and commitment shown by our supporters. This includes our board members, volunteers, partner organisations, funders, local businesses and community members who continue to stand alongside us. Whether through time, expertise, donations or collaboration, every contribution plays a part in helping the charity continue its work. The support we receive reflects the strong sense of community around us and we are grateful to everyone who helps make this work possible.

Thank you