

Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund Impact and Learning Report (2025-26)



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Community Solutions

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Background

The Scottish Government distributes the Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund to Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire, with the aim to support 'at risk' groups in North Lanarkshire through community-based support provided by the community and voluntary sector, to enable:

- Improved mental health and wellbeing
- Reduction in mental health inequalities
- Reduction in stigma around mental health and illnesses

£946.8k
of funding distributed



40
projects received an
average
£23.7k

Many thanks to the funded projects which provided information and to the VANL staff who prepared this report.

*See the Community Solutions website for a supplementary report with a full list of funded projects.

Objectives of Fund

- To develop a culture of mental wellbeing and prevention within North Lanarkshire and across Scotland with improved awareness of how we can stay well and help ourselves and others
- To promote and support the conditions for good mental health and wellbeing at population level
- To provide accessible signposting to help, advice and support
- To provide a rapid and easily accessible response to those in distress
- To ensuring safe, effective treatment and care of people living with mental illness

Learning and Improvement

The Fund's approach to evaluation, learning and improvement is guided by the Community Solutions **Performance Management, Evaluation, Learning and Improvement (PMELI) Framework**. Funded projects are required to capture information on the support provided, the reach, and the outcomes met by their projects. This report aims to share this impact and learning.

Please see the [Community Solutions website](#) for reporting on previous phases.



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In 2025-26, the Fund has...

funded delivery of
5753 sessions of
202 activities

supported
19,809
unique individuals

been supported by
262 volunteers who devoted
14,583 volunteering hours

This is the same as
8
people working full time
every week!

6268

people supported



To allow the fund to support as many organisations as possible, one project was funded per successful organisation

£630k

additional funding
secured



3593

people reported on
Community Solutions
outcomes

*Outcomes reported are based on unique individuals, and therefore may be different from total individuals supported

Funded projects have supported individuals to meet Community Solutions outcomes...

5155 People feel more connected, included and safe

2611 Carers feel more informed and aware

3539 Children and young people's health and wellbeing improved

5685 Adult's health and wellbeing improved

2361 Carers' health and wellbeing improved

3101 Family relationships are strengthened

4923 People feel more informed and aware

1339 Carers are more able to have a life outside of caring

2987 Children, young people, and families are more resilient



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Learning and Improvement Event

VANL hosted a Learning and Improvement event during Phase Four for funded organisations – on the 3rd December 2025. This year, the event was combined with VANL's CMHWB network to increase attendance. The event was organised at the half-way point of the fund delivery period, to:

- facilitate a two-way conversation between funded projects and VANL to discuss their experience of the fund so far
- maximise collective learning and knowledge sharing
- feed into reporting
- inform possible additional support from VANL

Projects were proud of the following achievements

General Themes

- Being able to build on previous phases
- Being able to sustain projects with funding cuts
- Being able to try new ways of working with the community, which opened their eyes to how much support is actually needed
- Seeing longer-term impacts of project on individuals, and to the project itself
- Secondary outcomes - ripple effects of the project's impact e.g. the project having an impact on families and people around them.
- Providing activities for people who cannot afford it otherwise

Project-Specific Achievements

- Employing a new member of staff
- One of their group members was involved with filming Spiderman in Glasgow
- One group member proposed an active family walking group. This is now part of their wider school holiday programme, and supports families within the community who don't usually get the opportunity to access activities or trips out of North Lanarkshire
- Motherwell Baptist Church have been able to access training opportunities for volunteers and people attending their café through the mental health network, including stigma free training

Projects experienced the following challenges

- There is more being put on the third sector with less resources
- Staff and volunteer recruitment and retention
- Managing finances and budgets – increases in wages, National Insurance
- No funding for counselling, and people are struggling to access counselling sessions
- Demand and need has only increased
- Being victims of their own success
- It is not possible to fundraise or ask for contributions when service users are living in poverty. One group said that even 50p will stop people coming



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Projects came up with the following new ideas

Project Specific

- Motherwell Baptist Church – to expand to having their café open two days a week instead of one, and focusing the second day on skills development
- Bazooka Arts – to develop home practice and embed activities in real life to support a change in behaviour outside of sessions

General Themes

- Started taking referrals from social work
- Recruiting a volunteer to look after children so adults can engage with project activities
- To provide support for in work poverty e.g. idea for an evening pantry

Projects identified their key learning from this year

- People's circumstances can change, and people can need rebound support
- There is more need out there
- There is more general awareness of mental health
- Projects can be delivered with reduced funding, however, not without impacting staff's mental health
- Lack of recognition, sufficient funding and support is impacting organisations and staff
- It is ok to scale back – quality over quantity
- Projects need long term stability in order to grow

Projects gave their advice for new projects

- Allocating enough time for admin, evaluation and feedback, and keeping this up to date is important
- Be organised, and get procedures in place beforehand
- Reach out to VANL for support where you need it
- Be prepared in case you are not successful in being awarded funding



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Unexpected Outcomes

In addition to their planned outcomes, funded project were asked to identify positive but unexpected outcomes. Some examples were:

Trust between the (gypsy traveller) community and health services has increased since the implementation of the Gypsy Traveller Community Health Worker Service. The service has provided a link between professionals and the Gypsy Traveller community, helping to improve communication and better understanding of cultural norms and needs within the community. The service has helped reduce barriers such as mistrust due to historical policies in Scotland. As a result more people feel more comfortable using health services which leads to better health outcomes and stronger relationships between the community and health providers.

MADE4U IN ML2

Some of the most meaningful outcomes were not planned at the start. We saw people begin to support each other, building friendships and checking in on each other outside of sessions. Some individuals who first came for support later became volunteers, which has helped strengthen the sense of community. Volunteers largely now run the pantry sessions and tool library, and have started to assist with community-led projects and maintenance around the building.

We were pleased to be able to support a young person from North Lanarkshire to attend the Pride Youth Games - a weekend long sports residential where young people were able to participate in a range of activities including archery, wheelchair basketball, baseball and tennis.

LGBT Youth Scotland

MECOPP

Many of our members are reluctant to undertake social activities outwith the centre and on an individual basis, due to some of the physical challenges and symptoms of a neurological condition. We arranged for two of our Volunteers to undertake Boccia training. Then introduced this activity to the group, the members now play fortnightly. It has been encouraging to watch individuals grow in confidence, in an activity that initially they had thought they wouldn't be able to do.

Parkinson's Self Help Group

The Miracle Foundation

One of the most notable outcomes has been the extended reach across multiple generations. While the project was designed primarily for mothers and daughters, grandmothers and wider family members also began attending, creating a richer intergenerational dynamic and strengthening whole family relationships.



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Impact

Achievements and the difference made to individuals - provided by funded projects in monitoring and evaluation reports submitted to VANL – is highlighted below.

Our refuge based Therapeutic Walking Group began in November 2025 and runs weekly, with 4–5 attendees on average. Women from refuge, outreach, and follow on support attend. Feedback demonstrates strong emotional impact:

- “Being in refuge saved my life... coming back to the groups helps me connect with women and has really helped me”
- “It’s taken me a long time to know that none of that was my fault... I really believe it now and that’s thanks to you”
 - “I actually wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for you all”

Motherwell District Women’s Aid

Our recent youth work survey showed the impact that we have had on the lives of LGBTQ+ young people in North Lanarkshire. 75% of respondents reported that they had been helped to make more positive decisions about their health and wellbeing, and 75% said that they had more hope for the future - which reflects reduced suicidal intention.

LGBT Youth Scotland

Cruse Scotland

- 84% agreed the support had significantly increased their health and wellbeing
- 95% agreed our support had reassured them their feelings were a normal reaction to grief
- 82% agreed they now knew how to access further support if they needed it
- 88% agreed they were satisfied with the service they received
- 95% agreed our volunteer was supportive

Members reported a significant improvement in their ability to cope, with average scores rising from 2.7 out of 5 at the start of engagement to 4.3 out of 5 following support. Mood scores also increased notably, from an average of 3 out of 5 to 4.2 out of 5.

Deafblind Scotland

Glenboig Development Trust

One of the most positive outcomes was the increase in confidence among participants. Many arrived feeling unsure about trying new tasks, but over time they had the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of activities, including planting seeds, watering beds, maintenance and caring for the garden, all with growing independence. They all reported feeling that the project had helped them feel better in themselves.



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Case Studies

Getting Better Together

Background

GBT has been delivering a successful early intervention project supporting families through pregnancy and early years. The project provides antenatal and postnatal support, helping mainly young or vulnerable parents improve their wellbeing, build social connections, and develop parenting skills. Over time, it has expanded from basic antenatal and baby groups to include nutrition sessions and wellbeing activities like fitness, yoga, and mindfulness, improving outcomes for both parents and children.

Volunteer Support

The project has been delivered with the support of volunteers. Volunteering creates a two-way impact, strengthening us as charity while also improving volunteers' skills, confidence, and life opportunities.

Volunteer Roles

- Support delivery of sessions
- Welcome and engage families, helping create a friendly and inclusive environment
- Offer reassurance and guidance
- Contribute ideas / help plan sessions
- Provide admin and outreach support (registrations, promotion)
- Help set up and tidy activity spaces

Volunteer Outcomes

- Skills development; communication, team work and organisation
- Increased confidence
- Increased social connection

Measurable Impact

- 230+ households supported
- 3 active volunteers contributing 10 hours per month to this project
- 100% of Volunteers reported improved confidence and wellbeing

Parent Action for Safe Play (PASP)

Parent Action for Safe Play (PASP)'s Healthy Minds, Health Lives project delivered a year-long programme of tailored wellbeing activities for adults living with long-term health conditions. The programme delivered 120 sessions supporting 70 adults with long-term health conditions and/or disabilities within Coatbridge. These sessions offered regular opportunities to engage in creative, practical and social activities that improved mental health and wellbeing. Across both programmes, PASP created inclusive, welcoming environments where participants-built relationships, gained new skills, and improved confidence. Celebration events were held as planned, showcasing achievements and strengthening community connections.

Overall, the funding enabled PASP to deliver a holistic programme that reduced social isolation and supported improved mental health and wellbeing for participants



"I started coming to the art group and really enjoyed being part of it. While I was always given the opportunity to take part in gardening and cooking sessions, I wasn't interested in those activities at first and chose not to get involved. Over time, I watched what other people in the group were making and doing, especially in the cooking sessions. After a few months, I decided to give it a try. This turned out to be a really important moment for me. Trying cooking was eye-opening. I had never wanted to cook before and always thought it would be too difficult, but I found that I actually really enjoyed it and it wasn't as hard as I expected. It gave me the confidence to try something new and showed me that I'm capable of more than I thought. The experience has made a big difference to me. I feel that the confidence I've gained and the relationships I've built will help me going forward in life."





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Case Studies

Cruse Scotland

Cruse Scotland provided Early Intervention Support training for their team of community-based volunteers to deliver small group and one-to-one support for recently bereaved people in North Lanarkshire.

L contacted Cruse after the sudden death of her father. They did not have a close relationship and had not spoken for a few years. L struggled with the guilt as the memories of their last conversation were not positive. She told Cruse:

“I felt that I shouldn’t be as upset as other people who have lost their parents because we weren’t close. However, the grief overwhelmed me and I struggled to handle my emotions. I wasn’t sleeping well and it was all taking a toll on my health.”

L received Early Intervention Support one-to-one sessions with a skilled volunteer who as well as providing active listening support, gave L access to tools and resources to help her process her grief. These included breathing techniques and mindfulness exercises which can help people feel less overwhelmed and more in control.

“The volunteer was wonderful. From the first moment, the sessions gave me the space to talk about my feelings without judgement. It was a relief to speak with someone who could understand what I was going through. He helped me realise all my feelings were equally valid - that it was ok for me to feel angry and upset with my dad but at the same time I was allowed to grieve for him. It gave me permission to have both these feelings and this helped me so much.”

LGBT Youth Scotland

F joined our youth groups because he was feeling isolated and wanted to make friends. His mental health was being affected by loneliness, and he did not know any other LGBTQ+ young people. He also has disabilities and was uncertain about whether he would be able to participate fully in the group's activities. Before he joined, our youth workers met with F to develop an individual support plan, ensuring he could access sessions both online and in person, depending on his needs each day.

Through regular participation in youth group activities, alongside one-to-one coaching sessions, F has found a safe and welcoming space where he feels a genuine sense of belonging. As his confidence has grown, he has developed new skills and even delivered a session to the group on a topic he felt passionate about. He has built meaningful friendships with other young people and has become more engaged and optimistic about his future.

As a result of this support, F reports feeling less isolated and more connected to others, and his overall mental wellbeing has improved significantly. With encouragement from one of the youth workers, he has also applied for a college course, demonstrating increased confidence, ambition, and hope for the future.