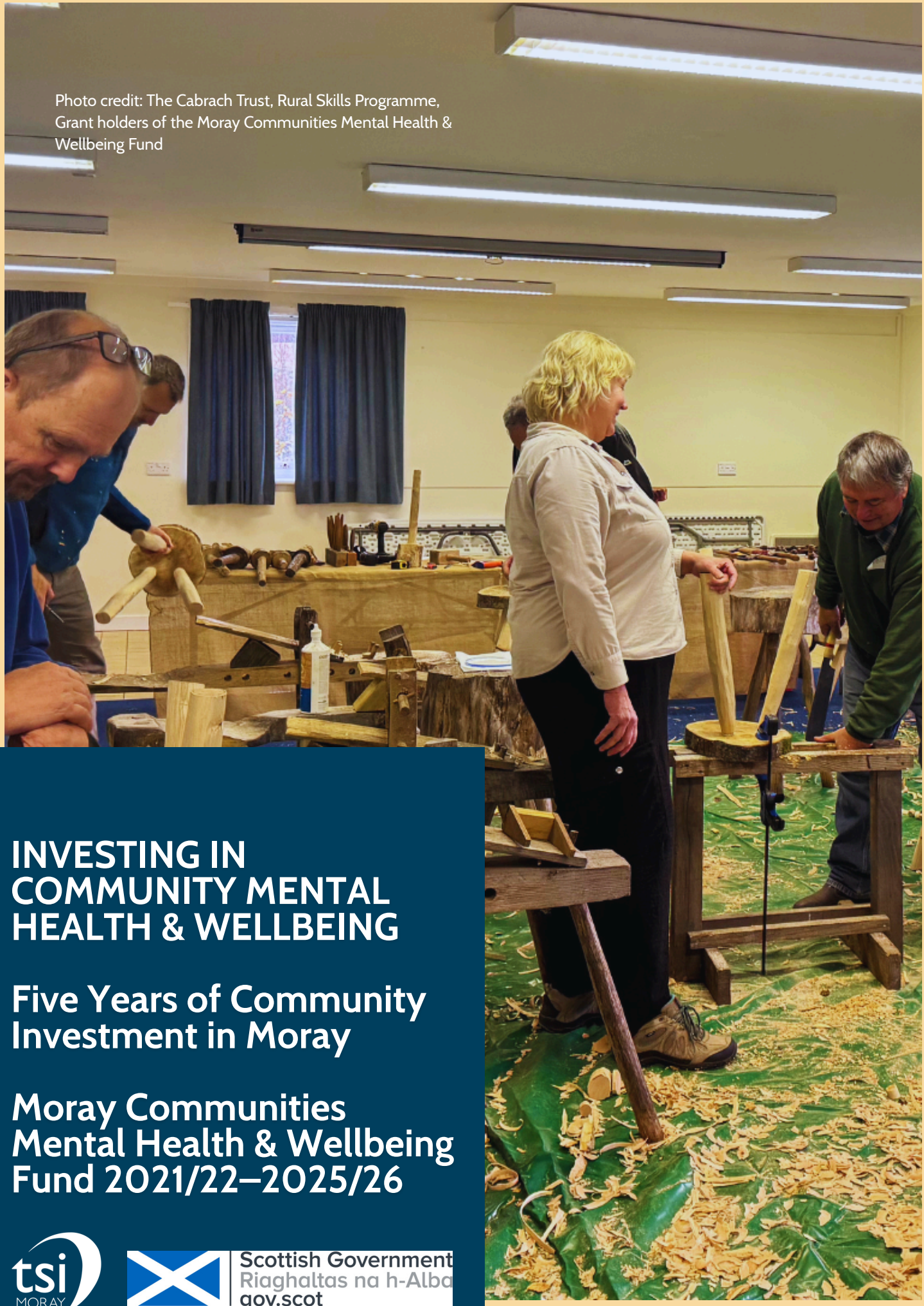


Photo credit: The Cabrach Trust, Rural Skills Programme, Grant holders of the Moray Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund

INVESTING IN COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

Five Years of Community Investment in Moray

Moray Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund 2021/22–2025/26

tsi MORAY

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Chief Officer's Introduction

Improving mental health and wellbeing is one of the most important challenges facing our communities. While statutory services play a vital role, the experience of the past five years has reinforced something equally important: communities themselves are an essential part of the solution.

Since 2021, the Moray Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund has invested more than £1.3 million in organisations across Moray. This publication reflects on how that investment has evolved, how organisations have grown in confidence and what has been learned through working with communities, public sector partners and people with lived experience.

One of the greatest privileges of delivering the Fund has been witnessing the commitment, creativity and compassion of Moray's community organisations. As the programme continues into Years Six and Seven, this review celebrates what has been achieved and provides a foundation for the next stage of community investment.

Jackie Maclaren
Chief Officer, tsiMORAY



Trails to Wellbeing

"Communities have always supported mental health and wellbeing. The first five years of the Moray Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund show what can be achieved when that contribution is recognised, trusted and invested in."

Five Years at a Glance

£1.33 million invested

187 projects

£252,525 match funding reported

The story behind the figures.
In Year One, a second application round was needed because demand was below the investment available.

Five years later, demand significantly exceeds available resources. This change reflects growing understanding, stronger applications and the continuing need for flexible revenue investment.

- **Around 3:1** funding requested compared with investment available
- **491 volunteers supporting projects in Year Five**
- **Small Grants** introduced to widen access for grassroots groups
- **45 projects supported in 2025/26**
- **40 → 72** applications received: an 80% increase
- **Years Six & Seven funding confirmed by the Scottish Government**

Photo credit: Mark Richards, Aurora Imaging
Naturally Useful, The Willowfield Project

Investing in communities is also an investment in prevention, resilience and the long-term wellbeing of Moray.

Investing in Communities



Communities are part of the solution

Mental health and wellbeing are shaped by far more than access to healthcare. Relationships, participation, purpose and a sense of belonging all influence how people feel and how well they are able to cope.

Across Moray, community organisations create opportunities for adults aged 16 and over to connect with others, volunteer, be active, learn, create and access trusted support close to home. Many would not describe themselves as mental health organisations, yet their activities help reduce isolation, build confidence and strengthen wellbeing.

The Scottish Government established the Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund in 2021 to invest in this community-led contribution. tsiMORAY delivers the programme locally, working with organisations, public sector partners and people with lived experience so that national priorities are interpreted through local knowledge.

Photo credit: Moray BALL Groups - Be Active Life Long Anniversary Project

Why local delivery matters

Moray includes towns, villages, coastal settlements and dispersed rural communities. Transport, access to services and opportunities for connection vary considerably from place to place.
Local delivery allows investment decisions to reflect these differences, draw on established relationships and respond to emerging needs while remaining aligned with the national programme.

A locally developed approach
The CHIME principles—Connection, Hope, Identity, Meaning and Empowerment—have been used as core principles in developing the Fund locally.

They encourage applicants to consider how their activities contribute to wellbeing beyond the immediate project.
Connection is a mandatory element of every application in Moray. This reflects the importance of relationships, participation and belonging to positive mental health and wellbeing. Projects vary widely, but each must show how it will create meaningful opportunities for adults to connect with people, places or activities.
Community organisations are not simply recipients of investment. They are partners with knowledge, relationships and strengths that contribute to prevention and early intervention.

"As we finished, and people were leaving, I helped Ken put on his jacket and again thanked him for being there and loved his chat. His friend with him also said, this is great from Ken I canna believe how he comes out so well at the meetings, and Ken said I just love this. So I'm smiling inside and fair chuffed we've helped this happen, without necessarily setting out to do that."

Buckie Thistle Memory Project



How Community Investment Evolved

From limited awareness to strong demand

When the Fund opened in 2021, many community organisations did not immediately recognise that their activities supported mental health and wellbeing. Community cafés, walking groups, creative activities, volunteering and gardening were often seen simply as community activity, while mental health support was associated primarily with statutory services.

The first round therefore attracted fewer applications than the funding available and a second round was required. This became an important learning point: the sector did not need to change what it was doing; it needed support to recognise and articulate the difference it was already making.

Investing in understanding

tsiMORAY offered sustained applicant support through events, one-to-one conversations and feedback. This helped organisations connect their activities to adult mental health and wellbeing, express outcomes more clearly and strengthen future applications, including applications to other funders.

Deliberative decision making

Each year, applications are considered by a panel comprising three public sector partners and four community representatives, including a lived-experience voice.

The deliberative process improves decisions and creates shared learning: public sector partners gain insight into community activity, while community representatives see applications from a funder's perspective and strengthen their own understanding of good grant-making.

Funding year	Applications
2021/22	40
2022/23	44
2023/24	58
2024/25	71
2025/26	72

Applications increased by 80% over five years. By Years Four and Five, around three times more funding was being requested than was available. This reflects stronger understanding and confidence, but also the pressure on organisations seeking sustainable revenue support.

The programme's strength lies not only in distributing investment, but in learning alongside the communities it serves.



Photo credit: Alexander Williamson
Dance North - Sing, Exercise & Tea Project

Broadening access

The introduction of a Small Grants stream created a proportionate route for smaller and volunteer-led groups. It enabled organisations requiring modest investment to test ideas, develop activities and respond quickly to local need, widening the range of groups participating in the programme.

Supporting partnership working

Reflecting the funding programme's commitment to learning and adaptation, Year 4 saw the introduction of a new partnership grant. This flexible addition encouraged organisations to work together, collaborate and pool resources, with successful partnerships able to access increased funding of up to £15,000 to support larger-scale, collective projects.

Investing for sustainability

In Year Five, Fairer Funding introduced two-year awards. The first annual instalments were awarded in 2025/26, with the same amounts committed for the following year. Multi-year investment has been welcomed because it supports longer-term planning, recruitment and retention, continuity for participants and greater scope to innovate.

Strengthening Community Capacity

Strong organisations create stronger communities

The Fund has invested in established charities, social enterprises, small community organisations and volunteer-led groups. Together, they form an important part of Moray's wellbeing infrastructure and turn financial investment into trusted local opportunities.

Flexible revenue investment helps organisations recruit and retain staff, coordinate volunteers, maintain activities, build partnerships and respond to changing need. The programme has deliberately avoided prescribing one model of delivery, recognising that organisations **are best placed to shape responses for their own communities.**



Wild Things!
Wild Wood Yurt Project

Volunteers multiply the value of investment



Volunteers at Lossie 2-3 Soup & Pudding

Year	Volunteers supporting projects
2023/24	152
2024/25	370
2025/26	491

Volunteers welcome participants, organise activities, provide peer support, share skills and sustain spaces. Volunteering can improve confidence, relationships and wellbeing. The figures show growing community involvement; comparable data was unavailable for Years One and Two.

Investment that attracts further investment

Funded organisations reported £252,525 in match funding from Year Two onwards. This does not demonstrate that every additional pound was caused by the Fund, but it shows that programme investment sat alongside and often helped organisations assemble wider packages of support.

Year	Match funding reported
2022/23	£33,313
2023/24	£122,850
2024/25	£62,392
2025/26	£33,970
Total	£252,525



Moray Girls Football Club - Their project established a pathway for young adult players over 16 to 18 years of age to continue playing at a competitive level.

'For Moray Girls FC, this funding is transformative. It has directly bridged a historical gap... For years, local girls hit a glass ceiling around the age of sixteen, often forced to abandon the sport they loved entirely. It creates a sustainable bridge to senior football.The fund recognises that wellbeing is not just a medical issue; it grows from belonging, activity, connection, and opportunity.'

Community Investment in Action

Funded organisations differ in size, structure and purpose, but each creates opportunities for adults to connect, participate and improve their wellbeing. The themes below illustrate the breadth of the programme.

Connection through nature

Walking, conservation, gardening and growing projects use nature as an accessible setting for connection. Participants can build friendships, develop skills and become more active without entering a formal mental health service. Nature may provide the setting, but relationships and participation are often the lasting outcomes.

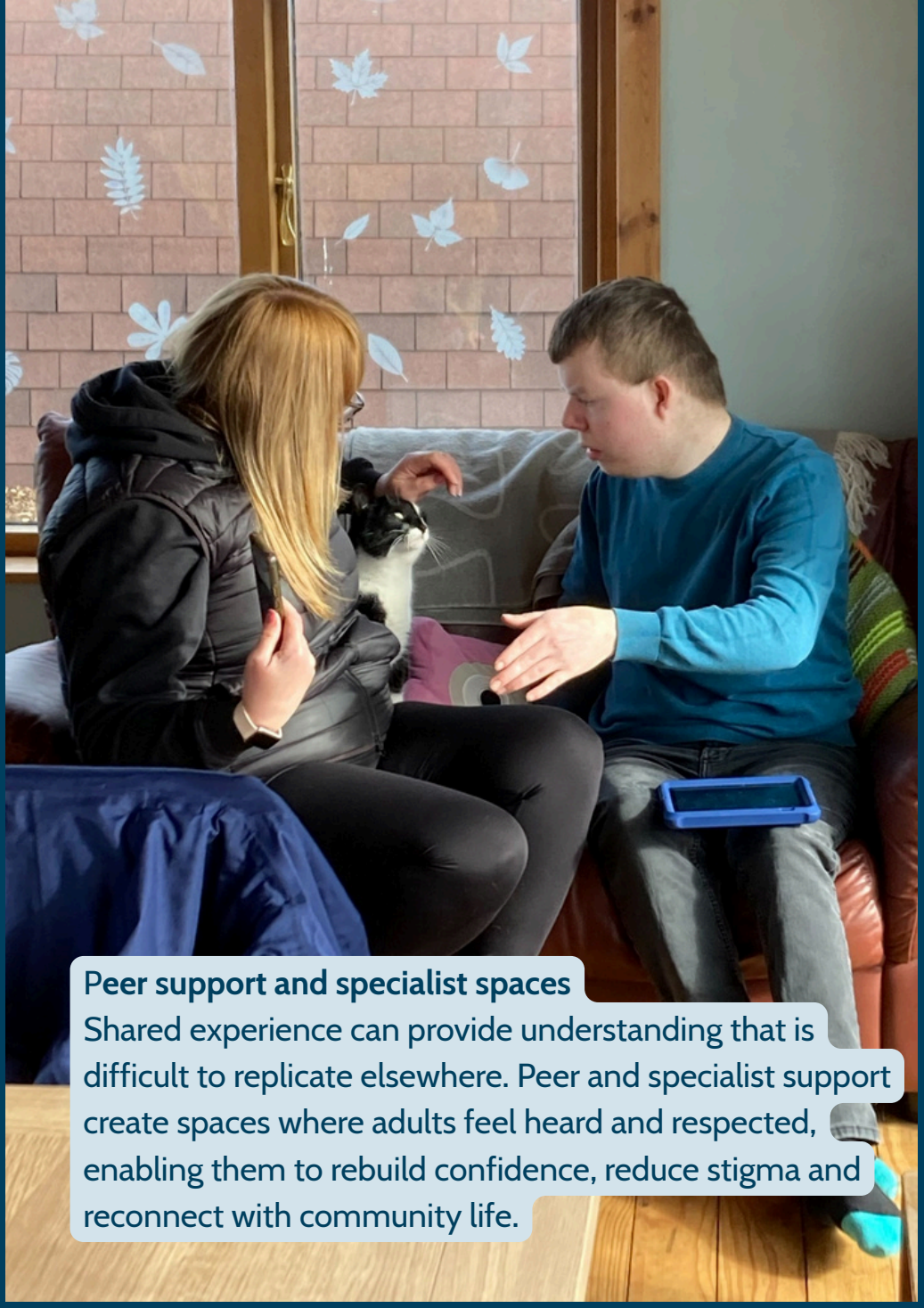
Welcoming community spaces

Community cafés, peer groups and drop-in activities provide places where adults can take part without stigma or judgement. These spaces allow relationships to develop at an individual pace and can offer a bridge to further support when it is needed.



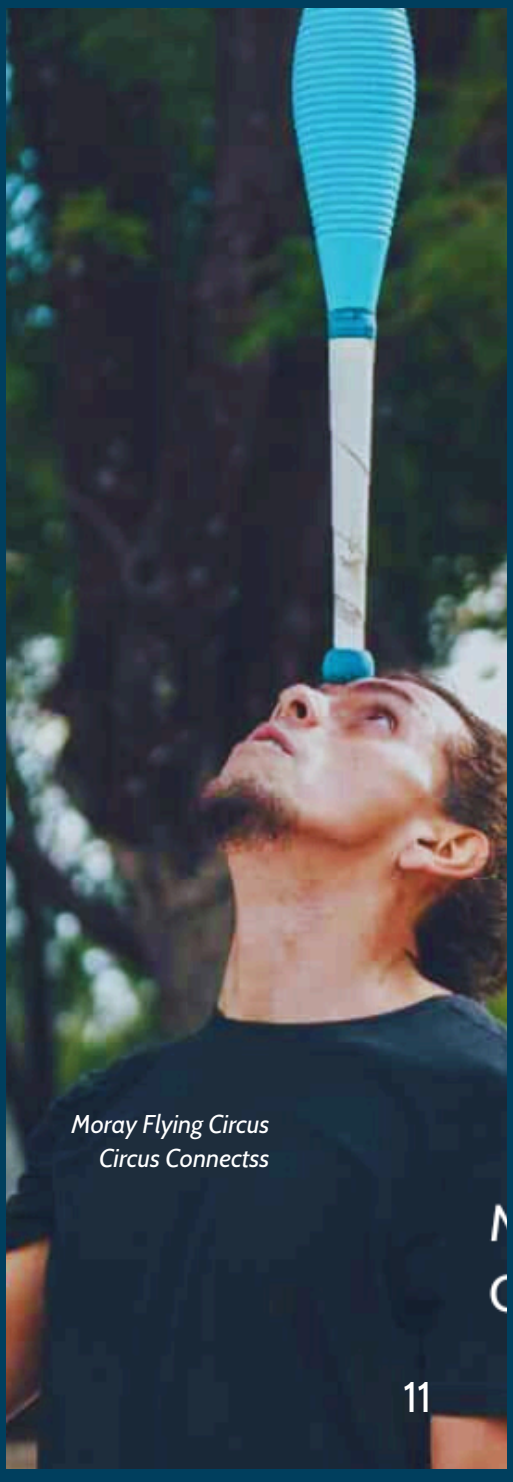
Tomintoul & Glenlivet Development Trust Art/Nature Sessions

"Not only has this got me out of my house, it's got me meeting new people, enjoying connecting with nature, having fun trying new things, relaxing and being able to forget my stress and anxiety. Its a stress management tool I have taken away from this course and put in to practise.'"



Peer support and specialist spaces
Shared experience can provide understanding that is difficult to replicate elsewhere. Peer and specialist support create spaces where adults feel heard and respected, enabling them to rebuild confidence, reduce stigma and reconnect with community life.

Creativity and confidence
Dance, music, art, craft and storytelling create routes into wellbeing through enjoyment and shared activity. People often participate because they want to create or learn; confidence, self-expression and social connection develop through the experience.



Moray Flying Circus
Circus Connectss



‘You’ve made my life better. You’re so friendly and helpful. A chance to escape.’

Small investments, local action

The Small Grants stream recognises that community impact is not defined by award size.
Modest investments can help grassroot groups test ideas, extend volunteer-led activity and respond quickly to local need, creating accessible entry points to the wider programme.



Lossiemouth Community Development Trust's Connected & Belonging Group



Moray Wellbeing Hub's Peer Support Work with Elgin Sports Development Trust and Mental Health Training

Every funded activity is different, but together they show that there is no single route to better mental health and wellbeing. Community investment works because communities themselves are diverse.



The Beginning of Finechty Men's Shed

Building on strong foundations

The programme now continues into Years Six and Seven. This continuity is important because relationships, trust and organisational capacity develop over time. It provides an opportunity to deepen learning, retain the benefits of multi-year investment and continue gathering credible stories and outcome evidence. Demand remains high and community organisations continue to face financial pressure. Future investment should therefore be understood not only as support for individual projects, but as investment in Moray's preventative capacity and in the sustainability of the organisations on which communities increasingly rely.

The first five years have demonstrated what can be achieved when communities are recognised, trusted and invested in. The next chapter begins with the same belief: local people, organisations and partnerships have a vital role in improving mental health and wellbeing across Moray.

Reflections and the Next Chapter

What the first five years have shown

Communities already hold strengths and solutions. Many organisations were supporting wellbeing before they used that language. Animation helped them recognise and evidence their contribution.



Living Lanes Project

Community organisations are part of the wellbeing system. They complement statutory services by creating trusted opportunities for connection, participation and earlier support.

Flexible revenue investment matters. It supports staff, volunteers, continuity and organisational resilience—not only individual activities.

Learning improves investment. Feedback, Small Grants and Fairer Funding show the value of adapting programme design as understanding and demand grow.

Partnership strengthens decisions. Deliberative panels bring public sector, community and lived-experience perspectives together and create learning across sectors.

Trust enables local innovation. Organisations respond most effectively when they are trusted to shape approaches around local strengths and needs.



Acknowledgements

tsiMORAY thanks the Scottish Government for its continued investment; the community organisations, volunteers and participants whose commitment brings the programme to life; and the public sector, third sector and lived-experience representatives who have contributed to the assessment panels.

We also recognise every organisation that has applied during the first five years. Whether or not an application was successful, each reflected a commitment to improving adult mental health and wellbeing in Moray.