



# Stimulating social enterprise in Argyll and Bute



# Start-up social enterprises help our towns, villages and cities to be great places to work, live, learn and create.

FIRSTPORT STRATEGIC AIM 2

Gordon Allen set up Wee Toon Environmental Solutions after being made redundant from Argyll and Bute Council's Employability team to fill the gap in local service provision. He soon secured a council contract to provide garden maintenance, landscaping, joinery work, customised shed design and build. His enterprise has provided employment and training for people facing barriers to work: improving their confidence, communication, social and life skills. Vital Spark provided support in business planning, bookkeeping and fundraising. Funding from UnLtd and Firstport has enabled Gordon to secure premises and buy a van. He now plans to grow his social enterprise and provide more jobs and services to his local community.

*Being involved in Vital Spark has been challenging and exciting. I have been able to take the business idea forward, I am much further on than I thought I would be and have learned loads.*

*Cover: Gordon Allen, Wee Toon Environmental Solutions*

In 2014, Firstport delivered Beyond the Finish Line, supporting young people from the East End of Glasgow to develop their social enterprise ideas, regenerate local high streets and create a social and economic legacy from the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games.

Evaluation of the programme found that enterprises developed in a local community, with a supportive structure, had more potential for sustained growth and impact.

This informed Firstport's decision to deliver Vital Spark in Argyll & Bute, an area with outstanding natural and cultural assets and vibrant community spirit, but also facing tough challenges, including social and geographical isolation, youth migration and an ageing population.

Vital Spark was delivered in partnership with InspirAlba, funded by Highlands and Islands Enterprise, supported by Calmac Ferries, Scottish Government and the Kilfinan Trust, with grant funding provided to participants by UnLtd.

This publication celebrates the achievements of the Vital Spark participants and provides learning points to inform future initiatives within Argyll & Bute and throughout Scotland.

*A programme that encourages businesses to grow and be self-sufficient is massively important for Argyll & Bute. I am proud Calmac has supported Vital Spark from the outset, its success has been astounding.*

*BRIAN FULTON, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT, CALMAC FERRIES LTD*

The Highlands and Islands is recognised as a region where communities take responsibility for shaping their future, where social enterprise as a sector is innovative, strong and growing.

HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS ENTERPRISE

**Vital Spark is an initiative based in Argyll and Bute, delivered by Firstport in partnership with InspirAlba. Vital Spark supported local people in and around Dunoon, Rothesay and Campbeltown to develop ideas into enterprises and provide practical solutions to social and economic issues unique to each area.**

In 2015 we engaged with local people from the Vital Spark areas, captured their views on the challenges their communities face and invited them to come up with enterprising solutions to those challenges. Over the past three years we have stimulated and supported the best ideas with 18 viable early stage social enterprises now creating change and making a tangible difference to their local communities. Many participants were at a pre-start stage initially – they didn't know they had a business idea and wouldn't have taken steps to access support on their own.

InspirAlba played a key role in the development and delivery of Vital Spark. Their local research and needs analysis identified a lack of awareness of potential opportunities through social enterprise. They provided tailored business support to participants across the three areas as well as their unique understanding and knowledge that informed ongoing programme evaluation and development.

**“** *Vital Spark allowed us to deliver support in a rural setting, stimulating greater awareness of social enterprise, encouraging ideas and supporting individuals to take them forward and creating social and environmental benefits for the communities involved. Working with Firstport and Unltd also brought a wider perspective and a broader scope of support.*

AILSA CLARK, INSPIRALBA

**“** *Vital Spark was a new and novel way to stimulate entrepreneurship and innovation in our rural communities, creating employment opportunities by using business models to address social issues.*

ANNE MACDONALD, HEAD OF POLICY AND STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES, HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS ENTERPRISE

**“**

**Vital Spark did what it said on the tin, it sparked me to move forward.**

DAVID FEE, HOMESONG



# Lighting the Spark

Vital Spark set up incubator spaces in each community which were used for drop in, learning, meeting, making and experimentation.

**These hubs enabled participants to test their ideas, showcase their products and services, and build collaborative relationships. They provided a physical location where they could go to work on their enterprise, engage with Vital Spark staff and unlock their potential as social entrepreneurs.**

**Complementing this model and Firstport and InspirAlba's support, funding from UnLtd provided the final crucial component, enabling the Vital Spark participants to set sail on their journey.**

## OUR LEARNING:

- Place-based programmes require rigorous 'intelligence gathering' and planning in partnership with local providers and local people
- Programme objectives must align with each partner's vision and purpose and contribute to local and national priorities
- We found a 'multi-layered delivery approach' captured both national and local resources, perspectives, knowledge and experience
- This resulted in new resources being leveraged to meet local needs in Argyll and Bute
- This approach reaches people who may not see themselves as having a business idea, stimulates social enterprise activity in local communities and helps build local and national connections
- InspirAlba's local knowledge was invaluable in the development, design and delivery of the programme while UnLtd provided grant funding to test very early stage ideas
- This partnership approach developed early stage ideas into social enterprises, creating a pipeline of previously untapped talent, which in turn informed UnLtd's decision to deliver Resilient Communities in Argyll & Bute
- Incubator spaces are an important resource. Having a physical space visible to the local community can help participants to see themselves as social entrepreneurs and legitimise their ideas
- These benefits could be delivered more cost effectively by sharing with other complementary local initiatives to maximise usage and connect developing enterprises with the wider community
- Seed funding needs to be sympathetic to the early stage nature of participants' ideas and flexible enough to respond to inevitable changes in funding requirements

## Keeping It Local Campbeltown

Jason McCallum has first hand experience of the difficulties traders face when trying to promote and grow their businesses. He is also aware that local people struggle to find reliable quality trade services. This spurred him on to open Keep It Local Campbeltown, a one stop shop for businesses and customers, enabling local start-ups to test the market without the financial and logistical constraints of finding their own premises. His enterprise offers people from around Kintyre support to hot-desk and advertise their business on screens and on line.

Jason received an UnLtd Start Up award and has now progressed further through Firstport funding to offer additional spaces including a workshop area for product testing and delivery. Jason's service will extend to negotiation of fair leases for local start-ups when they are ready to commit to their own premises. Over the next five years Jason would like to replicate his enterprise in other rural towns.

**“ Without the Vital Spark programme Keeping It Local would never be in the position it is in today - hopefully it will be a great community asset.**

## Takeaway Creative

Takeaway Creative is a portable hobby service offering innovative activities in private homes and care homes. The idea came from founder Fiona Page's personal experience as a carer unable to find quality home-based activities for her housebound mum. Takeaway Creative fills this gap and reduces isolation and loneliness. Fiona employs expert practitioners with strong social skills to communicate with a diverse customer base including carers, busy parents, people with long-term health conditions and the elderly.

**“ Vital Spark helped me with networks and ideas to bring my idea to market in a good way, supported by a team of approachable and friendly folk.**



# The Journey

**Vital Spark stimulated interest in social enterprise to address local issues and allowed participants to fulfil ambitions they previously considered unachievable. Developing the confidence, skills, knowledge, resilience and networks required to start up and develop a viable business was recognised as a key challenge for our emerging entrepreneurs.**

In response to these challenges, InspirAlba coordinated three Argyll wide social enterprise events, giving Vital Spark participants the opportunity to build connections with a broad, well established network of social enterprises across the area. They also provided links to other partners, including the Social Enterprise Academy, Business Gateway, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Community Broadband Scotland, increasing participants' awareness of support available.

Firstport provided opportunities for participants to go on 'learning journeys' using our Scotland wide network of social enterprises. This enabled them to connect with, meet and learn from other social entrepreneurs and jointly share knowledge and experiences. A programme wide learning journey brought Vital Spark participants together with participants from other rural place-based programmes to network, receive resilience training, meet funders and experience models of good practice.



## OUR LEARNING

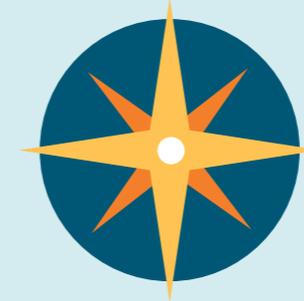
- Place-based programmes stimulate very early stage, pre-start ideas
- Time spent on 'idea development' is hugely valuable and helps participants build confidence and talk about their idea
- Traditional business support is more effective after this
- Peer to peer support and opportunities to network are important in helping participants develop and refine their ideas
- This flexible approach to personal and business support is invaluable in allowing people to progress at their own pace, work around other commitments, reflect on what they're doing and arrive at a positive destination at a time that's right for them.



**Come on board**  
**Application & Selection**  
 Local promotion  
 Information sessions  
 Application process  
 34 people selected



**Setting sail**  
**Ideas Development**  
 3 local hubs  
 Over 1000 1-1 sessions  
 Over 30 group sessions  
 £73k in Start Up Funding



**Navigating a way forward**  
**Business Development & Implementation**  
 Showcasing    Test Trading  
 Trading        Premises  
 Incorporation    Staffing & Volunteers  
 Service Delivery    Towards a Turnover



**Land ahoy!**  
**Connections**  
 Networking  
 Resilience Training  
 Stakeholder Engagement

## The Ripple Effect

Innovation and risk taking can flourish in an environment of trust and support. For some people, these are the vital ingredients that will unleash their entrepreneurial spirit and confidence.

*Creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.*

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT REGENERATION STRATEGY



Supporting participants to develop a social enterprise often starts with building confidence. Many doubted their idea was good enough or didn't see themselves with the skills or experience to run a business.

Vital Spark provided participants with time, space and people to discuss their ideas with, learn from and share both successes and failures. Access to professional staff and other participants through a mixture of 1:1 meetings, peer to peer support, workshops and networking created a supportive structure that enabled participants to build confidence, develop skills and take the lead.

Participants faced a range of personal and life challenges unrelated to their enterprise and were helped with these through the programme. It was this holistic and tailored approach to support that allowed each participant to achieve key milestones and keep moving forward at a pace right for them.

### ZPL Mobility

Based in Dunoon, Craig Peden and his partner are developing ZPL Mobility, a 'one stop shop' for people with mobility needs in the Cowal area. There are scooters lying unused in garages and gardens across the country, destined for landfill. ZPL Mobility maintains, repairs and refurbishes second-hand mobility scooters for sale or hire to locals and tourists at affordable prices. They are developing bespoke adaptations to make fit for purpose mobility scooters that also look good and have a unique appearance. In 2017 ZPL Mobility received Firstport Start It funding to progress the business. Future ambitions include donating used scooters to a charity in South Africa.

*The social enterprise ethos fits with our business goals. Our focus is on delivering a welcoming and high quality service available to everyone. Disability is about diversity, not disadvantage. We want to help people enjoy a life without limits.*

## Making Waves

Vital Spark successfully raised the profile of social enterprise as a way of doing business. It helped both participants and the wider community to understand what it means and the positive impact it can have. The programme evaluation recognised the important role Vital Spark played in filling a gap in provision of early stage support to social enterprise development within Argyll & Bute, taking participants from an idea to trading. It also acknowledged the challenges in translating ideas into social businesses and the importance of ensuring that the social issues being addressed were relevant to the local areas.



Targets for the programme were ambitious, although economic benefit has been created with some of the enterprises creating new employment opportunities and generating turnover. Vital Spark set people on their journey, but they still have some way to go.

*Further economic impacts are expected in due course. It takes time and ongoing support to develop into an established social enterprise and it is important to be realistic, especially within a challenging rural context. The value of these impacts in rural communities should not be underestimated.*

Total of  
**£125,240**  
of grant funding  
awarded since 2014  
(Unltd and Social Entrepreneurs Fund)

### The important contribution social enterprise makes to the rural economy

- Enterprise and social enterprise is a vital player in the rural economy. Rural areas in Scotland account for 34% of Scotland's social enterprises with only 18% of the population.<sup>1</sup>
- In Argyll and Bute specifically, £87.3 million is generated for Argyll's economy by social enterprise. This is a significant economic contribution to the rural economy.<sup>2</sup>
- The social benefit is even more significant with 70% of social enterprises in Argyll and Bute indicating there is no alternative provider of their services and many are delivering essential services which ensure rural communities can survive and thrive.

### OUR LEARNING

- Confidence and resilience is key to getting started – and to keeping going.
- A holistic approach to support, taking into account the individual, their idea and their personal circumstances is vital.
- This can be time consuming and may require other agency involvement.
- Traditional business support is most effective when balanced with peer to peer learning and networking.
- Targets were ambitious and delivering economic impact takes time. Of equal importance are the social and environmental impacts which shouldn't be over looked.
- It is important to be realistic about what can be achieved with participants at a very early stage and in a specific period of time. Connections should be made to ensure they can access longer term support beyond the lifespan of the programme.

<sup>1</sup> Social Enterprise Census 2017 Report, Sept 2017

<sup>2</sup> Social Enterprise in Argyll and Bute Report, November 2017

### Triple Aspect Puppet Company

Alison Clark has produced numerous puppetry productions on the island of Bute and throughout Scotland. Her work often focuses on Celtic legends and themes, appealing to visitors as well as the local community. Vital Spark has enabled Alison to open up her own workshop space to deliver puppet making workshops for all ages and showcase her creations and to buy equipment to take her shows on tour. In 2017 she was awarded a Lloyds Bank of Scotland Social Entrepreneurs Start Up Award and she has now taken on an apprentice.

*Being part of the programme takes things to another level and you start thinking in a bigger way.*

## Creating a long term legacy from Vital Spark

### Social enterprise and young people

Using Scotland's Year of Young People 2018, InspirAlba will promote social enterprise as a possible career option and a viable way of doing business through an Argyll wide film project. Young film makers will portray inspiring stories of life and work as a social entrepreneur in Argyll whilst gaining valuable work experience and training. Small start-up grants of £500 will be available from Firstport to any young person inspired by the experience and looking to test out an idea of their own.

### Digital tools to support rural social enterprise

There is scope to consider how improved Information Communication Technology (ICT) and innovation can support new and existing rural social enterprises to connect, integrate and cooperate better to deliver sustainable community services. Logistical challenges faced by entrepreneurs in rural communities require a more advanced and digital solution. InspirAlba are leading on the development and delivery of pilot activity in this area.

### Continuing the hub based approach

In Rothesay, the Bute Island Alliance is opening a community hub space, based on the Vital Spark model, to help local people and business to flourish. Vital Spark participants will be able to access and operate their enterprises from it. The hub is part of the Bute Island Alliance's wider regeneration strategy for the island and will ensure participants are engaged in other opportunities and initiatives in the area.

### Resilient Communities 2017–2022

UnLtd's Resilient Communities initiative will continue to stimulate and support social enterprise over the next five years.

*UnLtd was delighted to be a Vital Spark partner helping to support and stimulate new social enterprises in Argyll & Bute. We will build on this through our Resilient Communities work over the next 5 years, working with InspirAlba to support many more social entrepreneurs to build strong sustainable communities.*

THOMAS MCALISTER, SCOTLAND MANAGER, UNLTD

*Vital Spark kept me going in the right direction to get my business off the ground. It was also a huge help to be able to brainstorm and bounce ideas off the other participants in the programme.*

### 3B Design Studio

Paul Russell is using his skills and background in graphic design to develop 3B Design Studio, specialising in providing training and employment opportunities to local students, giving young people in Campbeltown a way to develop their skills and find employment in their home town. Paul also aims to donate electronic arts materials and equipment and provide training to schools. The aim is to teach young people the link between digital arts and traditional arts and spark an interest in more modern digital techniques, giving them a platform to take their skills into a wider field ranging from animation to digital design and special effects.

## Oil for the Engine:

### practical considerations for future programmes

- The key to a successful place based programme is the blend of national resources, support and networks with local knowledge, experience and expertise. Setting realistic targets and outcomes based on shared aims and priorities creates the best environment for impact
- Planning and delivery should be informed by and tailored to the environmental and socio-economic conditions of the local community
- Social enterprise ideas exist in our communities, but need to be stimulated and encouraged. This is achieved by raising awareness of what social enterprise is, promoting it as a way of doing business, and profiling it as a viable employment opportunity
- A balanced approach to recruitment is important to allow for inevitable drop off. Participants should be clear on the time and effort required to take part in advance of applying. The programme design should be able to respond to participants' other commitments
- Some participants focus more attention on the 'doing' than the learning. The provision of action-based learning is essential in keeping people focused and ensuring progress within a specific time frame
- A flexible programme of support is required to meet participants diverse needs; programme staff need to have a range of skills and experiences to manage and support effectively
- Ideas development takes time but is valuable. It is during this process that participants build confidence, resilience and skills. Other basic training such as IT skills may be necessary and should be delivered through collaboration with other organisations to ensure participants are able to fully embark on the programme

- A social media platform such as Facebook should be introduced at the early stages, taking into account digital infrastructure and accessibility. This ensures participants have access to local and national events and opportunities to inform their development
- Introducing participants to other support organisations and into other networks through the duration of programme ensures they are well connected and know where to access support in the longer term



We have profiled some of our Vital Spark enterprises in this publication. The others are listed below.

#### Ali McCrossan

Ali is developing an enterprise that aims to provide access to skills building to enable local people to feel empowered and equipped to deal with community issues. She is designing a training pack that can be delivered throughout Argyll & Bute.

#### Brandane Cheese

Alan Peacock is developing a Brandane Cheese for Bute and further afield. He plans to link it with the island's cultural heritage and support tourism as well as providing a high quality cheese.

#### Clean Team

Fiona Lavery is delivering a cleaning business in small villages in Kintyre centred around local community needs including window cleaning, wheelie bins, patios, garden furniture, roofs and gutters. She is particularly interested in supporting vulnerable people.

#### Cowal Play Therapy Service

Rebecca Blanco's vision is to set up a school and nursery based Play Therapy service with referrals from schools, nurseries, clinical psychologists and other bodies including Children and Family Social Work teams. She aims to offer a child centred, non threatening counselling/therapeutic service to children who are unable to verbalise their feelings.

#### Dabbles

Gillie Banks runs tapestry and weaving workshops for children, adults and people with dementia on Bute and in Cowal supporting the health, wellbeing, culture and tourism sectors, providing skills development and keeping Scottish traditions alive.

#### Diamond Quadrant Trust

Agnes Harvey is in the early stages of developing an enterprise that supports people to design and achieve the lifestyle they want, through bespoke support programmes focused on empowerment and building a life of personal choice.

#### Fancy Drawers

Catherine Wilson has created a space for the creation of high end bespoke items as part of her furniture and homewares upcycling enterprise that supports local environmental and social initiatives. A key aim is to share her skills and enable individuals within the community to work on their own upcycling projects.

#### Greenfry

Liz Adam's project focuses on providing tasty, healthy and affordable food, including a micro-bakery, event catering, community cookery school and workshops to teach sustainable food growing and healthy cooking to adults and healthy eating to children. Liz initiated her enterprise on Bute and is now currently developing it further afield.

#### Homesong

David Fee organises gigs in people's homes in Argyll & Bute. This provides accessible opportunities for artists and audiences to come together in isolated areas while supporting community and cultural cohesion.

#### Inspired by Autism

Dunoon based Duncan MacGillivray provides training, support services and small grants for people with Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) and their families and carers and professionals in the field. Using his experience in the care sector and as a parent living with ASC, Duncan also provides advocacy for families at care reviews, school meetings and benefits tribunals.

#### Kintyre Cultural Connections

Pamela Galbraith aims to rejuvenate the ceilidh and heritage culture in Kintyre and further afield by giving people of all ages from diverse communities opportunities to share cultural experiences through music, food and the arts. Pamela has secured start up funding and already established links with local Polish, Italian and Bangladeshi communities.

#### KytKat

Chris Annetts works with young people in Campbeltown on theatre, film and multi-arts projects. He is developing opportunities to work with local schools and support local volunteer opportunities with a specific focus on drama.



[www.firstport.org.uk](http://www.firstport.org.uk)

[info@firstport.org.uk](mailto:info@firstport.org.uk) • 0131 558 2724



**We would like to thank our funders and partners for their support:**



KILFINAN TRUST

Registered in Scotland • Company Registration No. SC312802 • Charity No. SC037942