



Newsletter December 2023

Local News and services

Merry Christmas from VAO



'As we all start winding down for Christmas, I wanted to take a moment to say a big thank you to all volunteers, charities, and community groups. Your hard work throughout the year is so important but it's especially valued at this time year which can be difficult for so many in our community. Your support will provide comfort in lots of ways so well done! Warmest Christmas wishes to you all - the team and I are looking forward to hearing from you and working with you in 2024!' – Morven Brooks, Chief Executive.

VAO will close on Friday 22 December and the team return from Thursday 4 January.

Pictured is one of the fabulous trees created by the VAO Connect Project.

Youth Local Action Group Up and Running Again

The aim of Orkney Youth Local Action Group (YLAG) is to empower young people to make their voices heard, enable young people to contribute to sustainable community planning, and allow young people to distribute funding to projects that are of benefit to them and their local community. With wide geographic and societal representation on the YLAG, it is hoped that organisations who would benefit from a boost in funding will apply and use these funds to benefit the children and young people throughout the Islands. The application window will open on Monday 8 January 2024 and close on Monday 22 January at 5pm. More information will be available soon; if you have any questions on how to become involved with the YLAG, or about the funding available, please contact Eilidh Wilkinson (pictured), YLAG Facilitator at eilidh.wilkinson@vaorkney.org.uk.



Youth Achievement Award at KGS

A group of pupils at Kirkwall Grammar School are working alongside Eilidh Wilkinson, one of VAO's Youth Development Workers, as part of their Youth Achievement Award. This award

requires pupils to organise and complete four challenges to gain an award equivalent to National 4.



This year, the group have already completed challenges such as learning about substance misuse and hosting a Macmillan Coffee Morning, which raised £250! They are getting into the Christmas spirit with their next few challenges and will be contributing to some important charities in Orkney.

To raise funds for the Orkney Food Bank, they are making and selling pom-pom baubles. With Eilidh, the group have been working through the Get Ready to Volunteer course and have created pamper packs to gift to women at Women's Aid. Morgan Maxton from Women's

Aid Orkney came and spoke the class who were very engaged and asked some very interesting questions. With Morgan, the decision was made to try and collect enough donations to create fifteen pamper packs for service-users at Women's Aid. After making appeals in school through the pupil bulletin, creating posters to display around the school, writing letters to Tesco, Superdrug and Kairds, and appealing to the Orcadian public through Radio Orkney, the group were able to put together 40 packs! Morgan joined the class to help sort the donations into individual gift packs and said that she was overwhelmed by the response, and grateful to the Youth Achievement class for their hard work.

Eilidh would also like to thank Amy Johnston, the YA class teacher, and the pupils for their hard work over the term. The Youth Achievement class would like to thank everyone who donated to their appeal, Kairds for the paper bags, and Radio Orkney for collecting donations.



Pictures: the Youth Achievement Class with Morgan Maxton from Women's Aid Orkney (centre) and teacher Amy Johnston (right); a selection of the cards made by the class to go in with the packs.

New Community Link Practitioner Joins Orkney Team

The Community Link Practitioner (CLP) team here in Orkney are based within primary care services in most of our GP practices, with the exclusion of the outer islands where the Islands Wellbeing Project is in operation. The CLP team are non-medical, providing social prescribing to those patients referred to them by the GP practices, linking them with other services and facilities within the community best placed to meet their needs.

The team here are part of a wider network of Community Link Workers across Scotland, with the Scottish Community Link Worker Network being facilitated by Volunteer Health Scotland. They organise regular online peer support and information events, providing added knowledge and value to the role.

As of 13 December, we are delighted that we now have a full CLP team here in Orkney, with Donna Cuthbertson, joining Linsey Drever and Erika Copland to provide the service across most GP practices in Orkney. Donna has a wealth of experience in running her own business and brings much knowledge and enthusiasm to the role. Following a period of induction, she will be ready to support patients of Stromness Surgery and is very much looking forward to doing so.

Also in the news

New campaign from SCVO



The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) is the national membership organisation for the voluntary sector. They have recently launched a new campaign #EssentialSector and produced a series of short films featuring 10 of the 46,500 voluntary organisations in Scotland. The films paint an inspiring and raw picture of the value and impact of the voluntary sector, showing both the challenges faced and the achievements made.

Links to the films and more information can be found on the [SCVO website](#).

Funding & Finance

Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund Round 3

The deadline for applications to the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund - Round 3 is 5pm on Friday 12 January 2024. You'll find the application form and guidance on our website. If you want to discuss your project idea or want help with your application, please contact Clare our Community Development Worker by email: clare.gee@vaorkney.org.uk or by phone on 01856 872897 extn 308. Our office will be closing at 12 noon on the 22 December and Clare will be back from 4 January. Find out more on the [VAO website](#).

VAO produces a monthly Training & Funding Update which contains useful information and links about current training and funding opportunities as well as enterprise and governance advice. To sign up, email: enquiries@vaorkney.org.uk and let us know you would like to be added to the mailing list. The latest update can be viewed on the [VAO website under help for groups](#).

Social Stories

Orkney Dance and Fitness

This month, we're talking to Donna Cuthbertson about her social enterprise, Orkney Dance and Fitness.

Donna first got in touch with VAO in 2022 to have a chat about setting up a bank account for a new social enterprise. Since then, Donna has regularly sought VAO's advice on how to reach her destination – the creation of Orkney Dance and Fitness to help Orkney community members make friends, become fitter, and live longer.

In June this year, Donna felt it was time to expand her operations and solidify the success she had built by applying for First Port funding.

Our community Development Officers assisted Donna throughout the process, giving advice on the application, and supporting the development of a robust business plan.

We are very pleased to announce that Donna has been awarded a 'Build It' grant from First Port.

For this month's Social Stories, we asked Donna about the journey so far, the impact she's had in the community, and what comes next for her enterprise in the year ahead.

Firstly Donna, we wanted to say a huge congratulations for being awarded the Build It grant with First Port. What will the grant be used for, and what do you hope to achieve in the coming year?

Thank you so much! I am over the moon to have been awarded this funding which will enable me to invest in training and developing new staff to expand what we offer into more areas of rural Orkney. The funding itself is used for salaries, and any profit we make is reinvested back into the community by providing work, developing new classes and staff training. We hope to train one to two new instructors and employ an administrator.

What inspired you start your Orkney Dance and Fitness venture, and why did you choose to set up as a social enterprise?

Dance and Fitness is my background, I have always enjoyed teaching and helping people discover that exercise can benefit you in so many ways, and I am very much a people person who loves her community. When I first spoke with First Port they helped me identify the structure of my business, and it was then I realised that I had been operating as a social enterprise for some time, with community at the heart of all we do. It was never something I intentionally set out to do, one minute I am teaching one class a week and the next I am running my own company which has a massive positive impact on people's lives.

What has been your impact on the community so far, and what impact do you hope to achieve in the future?

One of our main objectives is to combat social isolation. This is the UK's biggest killer and with a fast-growing older population everywhere, and a huge lack of resources this is where a social enterprise like ODAF can step in to fill a void or build a bridge. We also aim to get people moving more and feeling better both physically and mentally, combine those two aims and objectives and we have a thriving and growing community of all ages who benefit.

What's next for your social enterprise as we look to 2024?

As we head into next year, we have already put an advert out for the administrative role which will free up much needed time for myself to focus on mentoring the next generation of instructors and teachers and building relationships with the NHS and other clients.

How has VAO assisted your social enterprise? Have you got any advice for other social entrepreneurs on how to get started?

VAO have been with me every step of the way, their knowledge and lived experiences of running social enterprises and the third sector is invaluable. India has been fantastic with her advice and guidance, and nothing is ever too much for her. Before I felt completely lost in which direction I was going in to achieve my dreams, and without VAO's help I wouldn't be as far along as I am now. I'd say if you have an idea, any questions or need some advice about starting a social enterprise please get in touch with India and Clare who will help and guide you.

If you have been inspired by Donna's social enterprise and are thinking about setting up your own, our Development Workers, Clare Gee and India Whitwell would love to discuss your idea to see how we can help you get started. Email development@vaorkney.org.uk to begin your journey!

Volunteering news

Need volunteers to help your organisation?

We can help match up volunteers to opportunities, so if your organisation, charity, or community group has a volunteering opportunity, let us know. We can spread the word, promoting this on our website, social media and to volunteers we are meeting in person or at events. Just complete and return a [Volunteer Opportunity form on our website](#) to get started.

Volunteering opportunities

If you're interested in doing some volunteering, you can check out our website for all the latest [volunteering opportunities](#). If you haven't volunteered with us before you can complete the [Volunteer Registration Form on our website](#) and we can help to find a role to suit you.

Meet our new Volunteer Development Worker

This month we are pleased to welcome our new Volunteer Development Worker, Aimee Harvey. Speaking about her new role, Aimee said:



"I am delighted to have joined VAO and have the opportunity to support Orkney's thriving third sector and our local communities. I look forward to meeting volunteers across Orkney and helping them to find exciting opportunities, as well as working with our local third sector organisations to support them in developing volunteer placements."

Aimee is keen to ensure that the benefits of volunteering, for both individuals and organisations, are recognised, and is looking forward to helping to develop Orkney's voluntary sector. If you have any questions about volunteering, or if you wish to volunteer your time, even if in just a small way, then please get in touch with Aimee via email aimee.harvey@vaorkney.org.uk

If you would like to promote your organisation, an activity or project or have an interesting story to share, please contact Cecily.cromby@vaorkney.org.uk