

# Volunteer Centre Western Isles

## End of Year Report 2014 – 2015

### Outcome 1 : Everyone in the Western Isles Volunteers

Outcome	Activity	Indicator	Target	Result
Information on volunteering is available in a variety of formats and is easily accessible to all	Support prospective volunteers to find and engage in appropriate volunteering opportunities through 1 to 1 matching interviews, brokerage and follow up support.	# opportunities offered to volunteers # volunteers placed	250 offered 200 placed	offered = 320  placed = 141 ongoing + 162 one off  (inc 50 big knitters)
	Promote volunteer opportunities in a variety of formats, including online, social media, road shows, marketing campaigns and maintain an up to date database of volunteering opportunities.	# opportunities registered on Milo	Total 300 New 30	Current total = 421 (300 active on 31.3.15)  New = 113
Local employers support and encourage their staff to volunteer	Work with local employers to encourage and support their employees to volunteer including assisting them to find team volunteering placements.	# employers engaged	2 team placements by 31/03/2015	No team placements but 2 organisations worked with.
Volunteers are actively involved in communities in a variety of roles	Raise awareness of the different forms of volunteering, in particular, "one off" volunteering through promotion of community events.	# volunteers placed	120 placed in one off opportunities by 31/03/2015	placed = 162
	Run short term events that involve volunteers including trialing family service days.	#opportunities offered #volunteers placed	10 events run 120 placed in one off opportunities by 31/3/2015	run = 10  placed = 162
	Run volunteering taster days through WISE environmental volunteering project for children and young people	#sessions run #volunteers attending taster sessions	10 sessions run 160 attendees	29 events run Total young volunteers attending: 139

Volunteering is seen as a positive destination	Celebrate success stories publicly including holding ceremonies to celebrate achievements of volunteers and increase awareness of the value, diversity and extent of volunteering locally	#ceremonies/promotional events held	5 held by 31/3/2015	held = 12
	Host promotional events for campaigns such as volunteers' week	# ceremonies/promotional events held	5 held by 31/3/2015	held = 12
	Promote the benefits of volunteering through the media, facebook, leaflets, posters, displays and press items.	#volunteers placed #website hits	200 vols placed (80 ongoing, 120 short term) by 31/3/2015 30,000 hits by 31/3/2015	placed = 141+ 162 total 253 + 50 knitters total 303 website hits = 67,555
	Work with older peoples Planning Partnership and health professionals to raise awareness of the potential role of volunteering in keeping people active and healthy in later life	#volunteers placed #website hits	200 vols placed (80 ongoing, 120 short term) by 31/3/2015 30,000 hits by 31/3/2015	placed = 141+162 total 253 + 50 knitters total 303  website hits = 67,555
Increase in youth volunteering and in uptake of Saltire awards	Work with colleagues through "opportunities for all" programme, highlighting volunteering as a positive destination and assisting young people to find placements.	#volunteers placed	200 vols placed (80 ongoing, 120 short-term) by 31/3/2015	placed = 162 + 141
	Support children and young people to find volunteer placements and facilitate the Saltire Awards	#callanish awards issued #challenge awards issued #approach awards issued #ascent awards issued #summit awards issued	120 callanish 80 challenge 100 approach 85 ascent 5 summit 2 ambassadors by 31/3/2015	callanish = 96 challenge = 66 approach = 73 + 53 ascent = 51 + 19 + 10 + 2 summit = 2 ambassadors = 0
	Increase the number of young people registering with the VCWI and the uptake of saltire/callanish awards through promotional work, visits to schools, colleges, youth groups and community to give presentations	# saltire/callanish registrations #schools worked with #referrals from schools	200 new registrations 20 schools worked with 75 referrals from schools	saltire registrations = 205 schools worked with = 18 school referrals = 197

**Comment on progress:** Final numbers for the year have been very pleasing, with most reaching or close to targets. We offered a total of 320 opportunities and placed 141 volunteers in ongoing opportunities and 162 in short term opportunities (including Big Knit volunteers). All staff offered our brokerage service to volunteers who required it, and helped them to find suitable placements. Ongoing opportunities have been varied and interesting: some examples of these are Eilean Siar Foodbank, First Responders, Guth Bharraigh Reporter, Barra Citizens Advice, Uist Befriending, Adult Literacy and Numeracy Tutor, Cat Cuddler, Shop Volunteer, Chest, Heart and Stroke, The Big Knit and Cabraich Community Arts Traditional Music Nights. We currently have 300 active opportunities registered with us, which is an increase on the 284 of the previous year. (This figure varies as opportunities come and go, particularly one –offs. The total registered is 420, but includes those currently inactive.) While some opportunities have been discontinued, we registered 113 new ones over the course of the year, thus continuing to offer a good range of activity. We have had discussions with 2 organisations about employer supported volunteering, but they were unable to undertake team volunteering as the staff teams were very small. One retiring staff member went on to regular volunteering as a result of the discussions. We have actively promoted a wide range of opportunities and it is gratifying to know that people are responding to our work. We regularly send out our Hotlist of opportunities, post it, and other opportunities, on our website, and use Facebook to promote opportunities. In Barra we have good feedback on the latest poster offering a number of new opportunities: even small communities need information and encouragement to volunteer. 61 volunteers told us they had responded to VC promotional work.

Some community events we have previously supported have not run this year, while others have benefited from our past support and no longer need help to recruit for their events. Despite this, our short term volunteer figures exceeded targets. We are now concentrating on establishing contact with different organizations and helping them to recruit where relevant. We recruited volunteers for 28 events. The VCWI ran 10 events that created short term opportunities for volunteering including, Food Fest 2014 (general helpers), Christmas Ornament Workshop (co-ordinator) in Tarbert, the Volunteer Awards Ceremony (photographer), 2 afternoon tea parties (volunteer helpers) and an opportunity to give a talk to groups. Through the Family Volunteering Fair held in Benbecula in November, over 30 people of all ages had a chance to discover volunteering, and learn more about the variety of ways they can volunteer, either formally or informally. As an intergenerational activity, it helped to promote understanding, cooperation and learning between people of different ages, and provided the youngest (and oldest) participants the opportunity to feel included and respected. As an educational activity, it supported learners becoming Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors, and provided parents and families with a starting-point to discuss social issues with children. We plan to run this in other areas in the coming year as it was such a success.

The WISE project was set up by the VCWI in response to a request from the CPP. The project has really taken off this year and the numbers of young volunteers has hit our target: we have also had a high incidence of volunteers wishing to volunteer regularly rather than just as a taster. We have ended the year having helped to build 40 meters of boardwalks for a huge path upgrade in Uist, which has been made possible by working with other local groups. People have been able to use footpaths which were stopping access to areas of natural beauty and stunning landscapes. A local walking group have now discussed using one of the footpaths we have repaired, which had previously been far too wet and boggy for much of the year. We are currently in discussions with our CPP partners on the future of the project and are hopeful that the project will become independent from the Volunteer Centre, taking on a role within/in partnership with the proposed Countryside Access Trust currently being explored. We now have a volunteer in Lewis who has supervised a work session and is happy to do the same again. Another volunteer in Lewis is helping out with the young people's events. Covering the whole of the Western Isles for the WISE project has been a huge challenge. Building relationships with other groups has proved to be the success of the projects in the Uists and it would be beneficial to have the time to do this in each of the other areas. Community Council meetings etc are often held in the evening and accessing these and other similar community meetings in all 4 areas would give an even better chance of success in other areas. Unfortunately due to the geography of the islands this is unlikely to be possible without employing a second part time coordinator.

We are very engaged in the Older People's Partnership and have co- hosted 2 very successful networking afternoon teas in Stornoway, the second being in response to a request by participants at the first event.

We are really pleased with the number of young people registering for Saltire as a result of our work with schools, the college and youth groups. We have exceeded our target for referrals from schools and have made significant contact with the Nicholson Institute and some of the other primary schools, including the largest, Stornoway Primary. As the majority of young people are now registered in some of the schools, figures for new sign-ups for next year will be considerable less, being made up from the new intake of pupils. We have worked with 18 schools and had 197 referrals of pupils for Callanish or Saltire Awards. We have also continued to work with UHI Lews Castle College to support volunteering among students. We achieved our first Saltire Awards of 500 hours and have now awarded 2 Summit Awards. Numbers of young people taking part in the awards is high - we have registered 205 new volunteers for the awards - and we are continuing to build on our good relationships with the schools, other youth organisations and any organisation able to offer youth volunteering. This is high priority work and needs encouragement in some areas, where relationships are still

fairly new.

The main focus of work in the early part of the year was the Volunteer Awards Ceremonies held in 3 locations - Barra, Uist and Stornoway (for Lewis and Harris). Staff worked hard to promote the event and got satisfying numbers of nominations from around the islands. There is a huge amount of work involved in organizing these awards and the events themselves, but the outcome is that organization and volunteer achievement is recognized more widely, and publicly celebrated. The awards winners also expressed their delight in the accolade. Feedback from all events was very positive: for example, Cllr Manford emailed saying *"Thank you Karen, it was a pleasure. Your organisation and running of the event was a great success."* In Uist, there were 12 nominees and 2 of the new Clisham awards for outstanding service to volunteering. There were over 90 people at the ceremony in Stornoway. This event has received a lot of social media attention since the evening, with one of the articles written on Living it Up's facebook receiving over 2,000 hits, and other articles about winners of awards being placed in community papers. Saltire, Callanish and Clisham awards were also given at the Stornoway event

## Outcome 2 : Volunteers have a good experience and are welcomed wherever they go

short term outcome	activity	performance indicator	Target	
Opportunities offered are varied, interesting, well structured and supported	Support community events that rely on volunteers by assisting with recruitment and providing advice and guidance on volunteer management best practice	# events supported	20 events supported by 31/3/2015	28
	Work with organisations to identify and develop new opportunities to volunteer including supporting local NHS VSM to develop new opportunities.	# new opportunities	30 new opportunities developed by 31/03/2015	113
	Support VIO's with any aspect of volunteer management, providing advice and guidance on best practice and supporting them to reward their volunteers	# Organisations supported	200 organisations worked with by 31/03/2015	1.10 Health check =39 1.14 Board development = 6 1.13 Recruitment = 87 1.12 QS - WAVE =8 1.9 Volunteer management = 82 Total = 222

More local VIO's are registered with the VCWI and advertise their opportunities through us	Make proactive contact with organisations, publicise our services and register new organisations/opportunities for the VCWI brokerage service.	#New organisations registering # New opportunities registered	10 new orgs 30 new opps by 31/03/2015	Orgs = 57 Opps = 113
	Support VIOs with volunteer recruitment campaigns and advertising	#organisations supported	200 organisations worked with by 31/03/2015	Recruitment = 87
Volunteer managers can access training in volunteer management	Run training for volunteer managers	#training sessions run	8 sessions by 31/03/2015	6
VIOs receive a good flow of relevant information	Share information with VIOs through email, newsletters, website, facebook and meetings.	#organisations registered on Milo and receiving mail outs	450 orgs	420
	Meet regularly both formally and informally with staff and volunteers within VIOs to share information and aid our understanding of the issues affecting them.	#orgs consulted through face to face contact	75 orgs	108
Volunteer managers have opportunities to network with peers	Run network meetings for volunteer mangers and encourage collaboration between VIOs	# Network events run	8 events by 31/3/2015	7 (including 2 TSSF)
VIOs have access to best practice examples and more VIOs achieve WAVE standards award	Support local VIOs to improve their volunteer management practices by facilitating local standards award WAVE.	#orgs signing up #orgs achieving award	7 sign ups 7 achieving	sign up = 5 completed = 2
	Re-develop organisation support section of website to give easy access to sample policies and guidance.	#good practice guides/sample policies published to web	#20 published by 31/03/2015	26 published to web

**Comment on progress:** We gave support to 28 short term events over the year and recruited successfully for many of them, such as Harris Foodbank Collection, Mountain Festival Events, Entertainers for Afternoon Tea, Poppy Tea for Make a Difference Day 2014, the Commonwealth Games Queen's Baton Relay, Callanish Marathon, Lewis Carnival, Barra Feis 2014, helping to link up a group of visiting Irish farmers with local crofters in Ness, Activities Week 2014 at Sir E Scott School in Harris, Hebridean Celtic Festival 2014, Tattoo Hebrides, Barra and Vatersay Island Produce Show, Beach Clean-up in Carinish and Balivanich Community Clean-Up. We also supported one off events for the WISE project. We have registered an astonishing 113 new opportunities on MILO, which are on offer from 420 organisations, 57 of which are new to us. The final figures for the year are greatly above anticipated targets and reflect the success of relationship building across the organisation. This reflects a great diversity and includes both ongoing and one off events. Staff have worked hard to achieve these figures.

We are even more pleased that we have been asked to support the NHS WI with the redesign of their volunteer programme. We have been struggling for many years to encourage more and better volunteer involvement in the NHS locally and are thrilled to see a real enthusiasm and commitment now to improving and developing volunteering. We are currently part of a working group looking at the policy and procedures involved and hope that we will soon be able to report on many new opportunities to volunteer being created in the NHS.

We have met with 108 organisations face to face, representing almost one quarter of those registered. Some examples of these are Eilean Siar Food bank, Macaulay College, Benbecula North Community Company, Cobhair Bharraigh, Clann an Latha an De (Shawbost), Barvas and Brue Community Centre, North Harris Trust, Stornoway Old Peoples Welfare Association, Harris Environmental Improvements Group, Stornoway Running & Athletics Club and Hebridean Living, in Barra. We are pleased to be able to accurately monitor our contact with MILO database system and to be able to view the full range of groups we have worked with. Recruitment is one of the most regular of requests for help. By registering new organizations we enable them to access our services and with our Health Checks we update their details and explore how we could support them. This reflects, in part, a determination by staff to engage more widely, and is also partly due to networking and training opportunities opening lines of communication. We used the Volunteer Awards Ceremonies as an opportunity to contact organisations and encourage their participation. We promote using our website, facebook, local displays and direct e mails to volunteer managers. We reviewed organisation registration forms and created a new multiple opportunity registration form to make it easier to register with us.

We have successfully run 6 training sessions on volunteer management across the islands, with a total of 28 participants. Feedback has been excellent and indicates that these short sessions can contribute to improved understanding and practice. Some organisations have indicated that they wish to go on to achieve the local quality award, WAVE as a result of this, and we hope to progress this in the coming year. We ran a total of 5 VC network meetings and were very involved in creating 2 Third Sector Strategic Forum Meetings. Networking meetings, even with small numbers, are proving useful to participants and staff alike, and we plan to build on this year's successes by setting dates well in advance and encouraging participation from relative organisations. Targeting appropriate participants is essential to encourage successful interactions. Two networking events were for the Older People's partnership, one in Lewis and one in Uist.

We supported Buth Bharraigh to achieve their WAVE award, which was presented at the Award Ceremony in June. More organisations are interested in doing this, but we always find they struggle to make time to do the work. Will continue to be proactive in targeting suitable organisations. There are several organisations considering the award/working towards it at present.

26 of our policies have now been published on our web site, which should support organization development and the WAVE awards. We have done a considerable amount of work with the Living it UP project and helped them to link with local groups. Staff also carried out further promotional activity of the project in October.

## Outcome 3 : Volunteering is recognised as integral to the health wealth and vitality of the Western Isles

Outcome	Activity	Indicators	Target	Results
Clear evidence of volunteering's positive impact on life is seen everywhere	Collect feedback and evidence of volunteering trends, through MILO, case studies and surveys.	#surveys returned #case studies collected	50 Surveys 30 case studies	49 annual surveys returned in March. 32 Case studies/quotes collected
	Use evidence gathered from surveys, engagement events, training evaluations and feedback to identify issues and provide evidence to CPP as required	#surveys #case studies #engagement events	50 surveys 30 case studies 2 events by 31/03/2015	49 Annual surveys returned in March. 32 Case studies/quotes collected
	Raise public awareness of the benefits of volunteering through the media, facebook, website, leaflets, posters, displays, campaigns and press items	#episodes of promotional work	50 by 31/03/2015	How heard = 61 Episodes = 154
VCWI supports the voluntary sector to contribute to high level strategic meetings and influence policy decisions	Increase third sector awareness and understanding of the cpp by promoting their work on our website, events and newsletters and encourage and support third sector to engage with it where appropriate	website cpp section available #website hits on cpp section	200 hits section created by august 2014	Facilitate engagement = 5
	Promote the potential impact of volunteering on the achievement of the SOA aims through participation in the thematic outcome groups and supporting the sector to participate in the development and delivery of other joint strategies and plans	#references to third sector in SOA and action plans		Communicate = 12 Influence = 2
	Share extensive knowledge of volunteering in the western isles with partners	#partnerships supported	5 partnerships participated in by 31/3/2014	Partnerships = 10
The VCWI is recognised as the place for information and support with all aspects of volunteering	Promote VC services through poster campaigns, displays and talks/presentations	#episodes of promotional work # volunteers "how heard" = promotional work	50 episodes by 31/03/2015 20 vols	How heard = 61 Episodes = 154

Raise awareness of the VCWI and our relationship with CPP, CCIG through the media, facebook, website, leaflets, posters, displays, attendance at events, press items	#episodes of promotional work	50 episodes by 31/03/2015	How heard = 61 Episodes = 154
Develop relationships with key workers in support organisations/agencies to increase understanding of volunteering and number of referrals	# referrals to brokerage service from agency workers	15 referrals by 31/03/2015	14
Ensure policy makers and community leaders understand the important role volunteering plays in our community by involving them in the work of VCWI	# key policy makers involved in the work of the VCWI	7 key policy makers involved in VC events by 31/03/2015	12 key policy makers involved in VC events

#### Comments on progress:

The VC has gathered a good selection of 32 case studies or quotes (see examples at end of report) and using them to actively promote volunteering and to illustrate the benefits to partner agencies and CPP, including outcome groups. We had 49 returns for our annual survey in March, giving useful statistics and feedback. Feedback is also gathered from networking meetings and training sessions, giving more useful information which can also be used to priorities services.

Publicity work has been at a high level and staff have more actively engaged with promotional work this year, trying new methods and evaluating results where possible. We have had good press coverage over the year (15 items in press) and have had better publicity in all areas thanks to staff commitment (23 displays, 12 presentations and 20 other promotional activities: total of 82 episodes of promotional work plus Facebook, with a minimum of 72 posts). We are making increasing use of Facebook to get our message out. Links with other organisations through Facebook (e.g. Living it Up) have helped some of our posts have large numbers of views and likes. An entire display was created from the feedback gathered from volunteers at our Awards Ceremony in Stornoway in June entitled "What Volunteering Means to Me." This gives potential volunteers the chance to hear directly from those already engaged and raises awareness of the benefits of volunteering. We continue to attend events to promote our services and network with other agencies, such as The Poverty Alliance event in April and the Partnership Event in November.

We are active members of the Third Sector Interface, Co-Cheangal Innse Gall and all staff have endeavored to raise awareness of CCIG in their locality over the year. The development of the Third Sector Strategic Forum from November on has allowed staff to promote CCIG, and its overall role in supporting the sector, and the benefits of networking at a more strategic level. We regularly post items on the web site about CCIG and CPP and their activities, and circulated information to over 200 groups via e mail. Managers have taken a lead in the preparation, interviewing and initial support for the new liaison officer post for CCIG. Considerable time is spent on CCIG business but with the liaison office now in post this should ease some of the demands of the partnership. One of the VCWI managers ran a community engagement event in Harris on behalf of the CPP.

One of the mangers has been involved in the North Alliance and a member of the conference sub group for the conference held in September. Managers have attended partnership meetings such as Communities and Health and Wellbeing outcome groups, and PFPI. The VC had been active in 10 partnerships over the year.

We have been able to work with other agencies over the six months and have received 14 referrals from them. We were pleased to have a good attendance from a range of community leaders (councilors, MP, head teachers and the college principle – 14 in all) at our events as their support is important for the furtherance of our services and helping us to ensure they are aware of the value and diversity of volunteering.

## Outcome 4 : People and organisations of the Western Isles are able to access a range of quality volunteering support services

Short term outcome	Activity	Performance indicator	Targets	Results
Local offices available at 5 locations	Staff are available in 5 offices throughout the islands to provide support and services are well advertised ensuring potential volunteers/VIOs know how to access the support they need.	#volunteers placed	200 vols placed (80 ongoing, 120 short term) by 31/3/2015 30,000 hits by 31/3/2015	placed = 141 + 162 website hits = 67,555
Support available online and by telephone	VCWI services are available in a variety of mediums, including online, social media, telephone, face to face and outreach work	#volunteer placed	200 vols placed (80 ongoing, 120 short term) by 31/3/2015 30,000 hits by 31/3/2015	placed = 141 + 162 website hits = 67,555
Staff are trained and supported	Staff receive regular support and supervision sessions, annual appraisals and regular phone contact with managers	Staff satisfaction survey results	Results 4 or above	4.35
	Staff are able to access training and participate in regular team meetings	Staff satisfaction survey results	Results 4 or above	4.35
	Organisation achieves health working lives	Staff satisfaction survey results	Results 4 or above	4.35
	HR policies and procedures are in place to support staff and are reviewed regularly	Staff satisfaction survey results	Results 4 or above	4.35
Appropriate technology and resources are available to staff	Staff have access to Milo and are competent in its use	# training sessions attended	all staff trained	all staff trained and using MILO
Funding is secure	Financial monitoring procedures are in place	Board meetings held	4 meetings held	Held in May, August (+ AGM), November and February
Work is well planned, monitored and reported on	Annual report presented at AGM and widely available	Report produced	On web and circulated to stakeholders	On web and circulated to stakeholders
	Monthly reports submitted by staff	#reports produced	Monthly	All submitted

	Workplan is developed at meetings involving the whole team	workplan produced	March 2015	Final version ready March 15
	Workplans and reports are available online	#reports produced	Quarterly reports to funders and annual stakeholders at AGM and CCIG annual network event summer 2014	All produced on time.
Board are knowledgeable and committed	Regular board meetings are held	#board meetings	Feb, May, Aug, Nov	Held in May, August (+ AGM), November and February
	Continuous improvement is embedded in the organisation	EFQM c2e		
VCWI is part of the VAS network	Attend regular meetings, participate in relevant network opportunities including annual conference	# meetings attended	2 per year	Attended by managers.

**Comments on progress:** All offices operating according to scheduled hours and staffing levels. However, the development worker for the Ness area retired in December 2014 after 16 years with us, and due to funding restrictions, the decision was taken to close the office there, leaving us with 4 offices. The service in Stornoway has now been extended to include this area. The Stornoway development worker also left us in December but the new worker was successfully recruited and started in January 2015. Thanks in part to good publicity over the period, we are achieving our targets for volunteer placements. Staff are all conversant with MILO and recording more accurately as a result. One of the managers is on the MILO users group and takes the lead role for MILO for all of CCIG.

Supervision was carried out for all staff in June and October, when the team meeting also took place. Appraisals were held in February as part of the work review for the year. The new reporting system for staff, which is linked to MILO, is proving both popular and successful. The aim is to streamline reporting and maximize staff time. Staff have been pleased to see how the information put into the system can give us more accurate and useful data in some areas that we were previously unable to monitor (e.g. breakdown of subject covered in meetings with organisations). We took time at the team meeting in January to review our work more reflectively, and came up with some creative new ideas for next year's work plan. The individual training budgets have also been popular and some staff have used this to access Mental Health training, which was very helpful and was promoted to other staff. 4 of the staff attended the North Alliance Conference in Nairn, which they found to be both interesting and broadly applicable, helping to raise further awareness of the Community Learning and Development (CLD) role of the VC. Managers are delighted that we maintain a satisfaction score of over 4 consistently.

All office risk assessments have been reviewed and are up to date. PAT testing has been carried out in all of the offices. Pensions have now been set up on NEST for all staff who require this and is being implemented on TAS. Budgets have been revised in line with new funding secured from NHS, which picked up our shortfall for the year 14/15. The Board have been kept informed of developments in between board meetings and subgroup meetings for finance have been held. In addition, reports are compiled for the board and treasurer. Regular financial monitoring takes place and budget setting is given painstaking consideration. Board meetings held as per plan and the board has carried out a self evaluation (with support from managers) to assess their development needs, resulting in several short training sessions being run. The Annual Report has been prepared and has contributions from all offices. It was presented at the AGM in August and it is now being widely distributed, including to all councilors.

We have decided not to aim for Healthy Working Lives Silver award as this is more suited to larger organisations. Health information and team activities are carried out under the Bronze Award and we took part in a 'virtual tea break' in July using phone conferencing (and a lot of biscuits) as a staff team to help build relationships among staff.

## Case Studies and Impact Statements

Murdo Smith came into the volunteer centre after a long break from volunteering, looking to get involved in something new again. Murdo was hoping to boost his CV and after a brokerage session with Lewis Development Worker Kathryn, selected Volunteering at Isles Fm Community Radio Station. Murdo began volunteering at Isles Fm one afternoon every week. Murdo helps out the reception and administration area during one of the live radio shows. This supports the radio presenter by taking calls and being able to meet and greet any visitors. Asked about his volunteering Murdo said: "I am really enjoying volunteering. The benefit I find from volunteering is that it is good work experience and beneficial before finding full time employment. There is the added satisfaction that you are helping people in the community. There is also a wide range of work you can choose from and times that are suitable for you."

In 2014 we worked with the Secondary 2 Elective class of the Nicolson Institute on a Thursday afternoon. We have provided the young people with the basic knowledge and understanding of volunteering and the Volunteer Centre. The class chose 2 volunteering projects: help out Action for Children by painting their fences and shed, and then to visit Blar Buidhe to spend time with the residents. The young people have been enthused by the practical project and some even offering to complete painting the fence in their own time! Comments from the young people include:

"I would encourage other people to volunteer because it is so much fun, it does good and it keeps you from being bored! Volunteering has made me want to do so much more for people."  
"I enjoyed meeting and talking to the old people. I would encourage other people to volunteer because it is fun and it is a nice feeling being able to help people. It has made me aware of different problems people have and it makes you happy to help them."

In March the North Harris Trust approached the Volunteer Centre to help find volunteers for their tree-planting scheme at Ardvourlie Community Woodland. Publicity on facebook led to two families who are new to the area coming forward. They tackled the work with great enthusiasm and energy, and between them planted around 750 trees! One of the volunteers said: ' We all left with a great sense of achievement and something being left for others in years to come! Hopefully our grandkids will come back and see our forest!!' Another said 'thank you – we really enjoyed the day.' Matt Watts, the North Harris Trust Ranger who co-ordinated the event was delighted with the volunteers, saying: 'The weather was perfect and it was a real pleasure working with everyone. On behalf of the North Harris Trust I'd like to say a huge thank you to the Volunteer Centre and everyone who volunteered. It was great to see so many people working together to improve our environment.' The children received Callanish and Saltire Challenge certificates for their efforts, as well as gaining an introduction to volunteering that will hopefully inspire them to continue offering to help in the future.

In the course of promotional work at the International Women's Day event in Uist, we made contact with a woman who subsequently attended the Volunteer Centre for advice on opportunities for her foster-daughter, who is visiting from Germany as part of an exchange programme. Because the girl is home-schooled, and due to her background, the girl had initially found it difficult to feel settled in the community. She had begun volunteering at the Riding School, and her foster-mother noted how this had improved her confidence and emotional well-being. By providing information on other volunteering opportunities, such as WISE, the young woman has further opportunities to make friends, and gain confidence, and as she's now registered for Saltire Awards, she'll have a more formal documentation of her achievements, which her foster-mother feels will help to further improve her engagement with education, and provide benefits to her CV.

By delivering our Kisimul Award, four of the regular volunteers at Cothrom (two of whom have Learning Disabilities, and one who has been long-term unemployed) have gained public recognition and appreciation for their contributions. This type of award not only improves the experience of volunteers within an organisation, it can help to boost volunteers' confidence, and is a way to demonstrate dedication and community service to prospective employers.

Volunteer Rana Wood was a summer visitor to South Uist who visited the VC to find local opportunities. "As a newcomer to the island I wanted to learn about things that were happening, meet people and contribute something." She was placed in a few different opportunities, which helped her tap into local events and meet people. She enjoyed "learning more about the island and meeting people," and feels that volunteering has "enriched [her] time here." She would recommend volunteering to others: "If you have the time, it's good to contribute to the community in which you live and many rely on volunteers." Regarding the Volunteer Centre's services, she wrote: "I'm grateful to the Volunteer Centre for helping me and showing me the opportunities."

The volunteer development done with Saltire volunteers in Barra has had a major affect on their employability and access to higher education. We have developed a close working partnership with Castlebay School and CLD (community education and Development) and this partnership is valued by the school as they can clearly see the benefits their pupils receive from taking part in the awards. Case studies gathered from Saltire volunteers show the differences made to young people's confidence and attainment. For example Saltire Volunteer Mairi Maclean said: "Volunteering has made me more confident in talking to others, both children and adults". In December the Saltire Awards ceremony in Barra highlighted the positive impact of Volunteering by young people. 70 pupils and teachers attended the event where 54 pupils received certificates. During the awards presentation it was highlighted that older pupils will be able to record their Saltire achievements in their CV and UCAS applications. Pupils are aware that volunteering increases their employability, and may make all the difference when applying for places which are oversubscribed. It was discussed with pupils that, as well as becoming better citizens, they have learned many new skills while volunteering which are transferable to the job market.

Mairi MacLean has left school and is spending a year working on Barra before moving on to further education. All through secondary school Mairi was an active participant in sailing and windsurfing with Barra Watersports Club. Once Mairi progressed through the various stages at the club she stayed on as a volunteer helping other young people to enjoy this exciting hobby. Mairi said: "I knew that I couldn't have done my sailing stages without the help of volunteers therefore; it was my turn to give back to the club!" Mairi was one of the first pupils to sign up for volunteering awards at Castlebay School. In 2011 Mairi took part in Millennium Volunteering Awards gaining a 100 hour certificate. In 2012 Mairi moved on to Saltire Awards. Her regular commitment to volunteering has resulted in Mairi achieving a 500 hour Ascent Award.

Over 3 years ago Megan was encouraged by her school support group, First Steps, to look into volunteering as she had no idea what she wanted to do after leaving school. She approached the Volunteer Centre with her support worker to see what opportunities were available, and after discussion she was put in touch with Alzheimers (Lewis and Harris). Megan commented: "The staff of the Volunteer Centre were very welcoming, patient and kind towards me, so I didn't feel under pressure at all."

Megan started volunteering at the day centre, and this worked in well with her college course, which was Dementia related. She started off slowly improving her confidence and skills and has improved so much that she is now a great help to all at the Solas Day Centre. She has now achieved the Ascent level of Saltire awards (500 hours) and was presented with this award at the centre. The local councillor also sent a lovely letter congratulating her on her success. One mentor at the centre commented: "Megan has come a long way. When she first started she was very shy, it is lovely to see how far she has come on. She is a lovely girl who has grown in confidence and skill. She is doing sterling work here." Megan is looking to the future and hoping to eventually get a job as a support worker at the centre. In the meantime along with her mentor she is making up a small book which includes her pathway to volunteering and evidence of her working with the service users so that she can produce this at any future interview for support work jobs. To sum up her experience of volunteering Megan said: "I really feel like I am actually helping folk out as well as achieving at the same time."

Feedback from organisations shows that the Volunteer Centre is supporting VIO's with their volunteer development. The work we do has an impact on organisations and how they involve volunteers in their organisation. For example in June Buth Bharraigh shop achieved the WAVE awards after working closely with the Volunteer Centre. When if the VC has supported them the feedback was: "Yes, (with) WAVE award and excellent feedback on volunteer handbook and at volunteer awards."

A chat with a couple of people in the local community led to the VC office in Harris organising a donation event in Harris for the Eilean Siar Foodbank. This was held during the popular Charities Fayre at the Tarbert Community Centre, and proved to be a great success with 11 crates full of donated items being sent up to Stornoway for distribution. The VC was helped by 5 volunteers, who gave up some of their Saturday to help collect, check sort and transport the donations. After the event one said: 'Pete and I had a great time volunteering - and what a marvelous turn out from a really caring community!' A representative from Eilean Sair Foodbank was thrilled to hear of the event's success - posting on facebook: 'Big thanks to the Volunteer Centre in Harris for organising a donation event for the foodbank. And a big thank you to everyone who donated and especially to the volunteers who made it happen. You guys are amazing!'

Our Stornoway development worker met with the Stornoway Old People Welfare Association to discuss intergenerational volunteering opportunities. Following on from the meeting they have decided to re-start the Wednesday Club. They have set the time to allow school students from the Nicolson to attend after school on a Wednesday for the second half of the session. They said they were very encouraged by the desire of young people to become involved. A young volunteer later came to us and said she was struggling to find somewhere to volunteer for her on her bronze award in the Duke of Edinburgh awards and therefore would not be able to complete her first award. With our support she began volunteering at the Wednesday Club at the retirement centre, which she can currently attend once a week every week after school, and will soon be well on her way to achieving her first award.

Alice visited the Volunteer Centre in July 2013. She had recently moved to the islands and didn't know many people other than her family. Alice had worked as a psychiatric nurse before retiring and had a keen interest in mental health. Alice was looking for an opportunity that would allow her to meet new people and be more social. The Volunteer Centre put her in touch with Del at Western Isles Association for Mental Health (WIAMH). Alice started volunteering with WIAMH in September 2013 and loves it. We caught up with her again in March 2015.

Alice volunteers as a support worker at the drop in centre "Catch 23". She volunteers as part of a team on a rota alongside other volunteers and paid staff. The manager, Del, explained that WIAMH relies on volunteers for the delivery of services. "Alice is a fabulous volunteer, she really gets stuck in and the fit was seamless from the start. Alice was a natural fit for the organisation and is a valued member of the team". Del went on to explain that he loses around 80% of his volunteers to education or employment and they all come back for a reference, which he's happy to provide and that a lot of his volunteers become staff at the centre. Asked about why she wanted to volunteer, Alice explained that her main motivation was company. "It gets you out of the house and you make new friends". Alice said she would definitely recommend volunteering to others: "More people should do it; there are lots of elderly people who could do something and should. It's really nice to go to the supermarket now and know people. It can be lonely on an island if you don't mix. My volunteering has made me lots of new friends. I would do more if I didn't have a dog at home."