



NEWSLETTER

YOUTH AND PHILANTHROPY IN ACTION

In December, Castlebay Community School hosted its **Youth and Philanthropy Initiative Final**, marking another year of community-focused learning. This was the eleventh year the school has taken part in the programme, bringing the total amount of grant funding awarded to local charities in Barra to an impressive **£33,000**.

The Youth and Philanthropy Initiative (YPI), delivered nationally by The Wood Foundation, encourages young people across Scotland to research social issues relevant to their own communities, engage with third sector organisations and make informed decisions about charitable funding.

Locally, the programme is co-ordinated by the Volunteer Centre Western Isles, working closely alongside Education staff and The Wood Foundation to ensure the programme runs successfully.



The school extends thanks to all pupils, staff and judges for their time and commitment.

Pictured: Above right: YPI winners / Above left: S3 and S4 pupils participating in the YPI Final



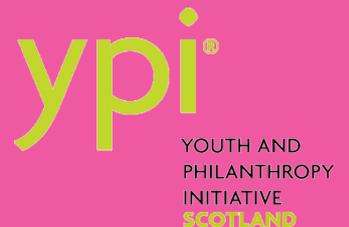
Young people are encouraged to volunteer with their chosen charities, helping them to build skills, confidence and a stronger connection to their community.

At Castlebay School, twenty four pupils from S3 and S4 took part, representing **Garadh a Bhagh a Tuath, Cobhair Bharagh, WICCI, Hebrides Alpha** and the **Duke of Edinburgh's Award**.

Five local judges faced the challenging task of selecting a winner after hearing a series of well-prepared and thoughtful presentations. The **£3,000 grant** was ultimately awarded to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, recognising the positive impact of its work locally.

ISLAND PUPILS GIVE BACK IN BIG WAYS

Over the years, the Wood Foundation Youth and Philanthropy Initiative, co-ordinated locally by the Volunteer Centre Western Isles, has brought significant funding to island charities. Pupils from Western Isles schools identify causes that matter to them and present to a judging panel for the chance to secure a £3,000 grant. Alongside this, the young people contribute many hours of volunteering and fundraising.



Past YPI Beneficiaries include:

Western Isles Women's Aid

Crossroads

Action for Children

Western Isles Community Care Forum

CRY (Cardiac Risk in the Young)

Alzheimer Scotland

Uist and Barra Foodbank

RNLI Leverburgh

Bethesda Hospice and Care Home

THE HEART OF UIST – A VOLUNTEERING SPOTLIGHT

Volunteering takes many forms across Uist, and its impact can be seen in every corner of community life. From highly trained individuals on call as First Responders to the many committees whose members give their time freely, volunteering underpins the services, events and connections that sustain island life.

Young people also play an active role, with local children participating in beach clean ups, while students at Sgoil Lionacleit work towards Duke of Edinburgh and Saltire Awards by giving their time in meaningful ways. Larger annual events such as the Agricultural Shows, Eilean Dorcha Festival and the Benbecula Half Marathon and 10k simply could not take place without the dedication of volunteers.

Volunteering can be a shared activity or an individual one and it does not always require leaving home. During the autumn, the Volunteer Centre Western Isles ran a knitting appeal in support of The Leanne Fund, an island-based charity which assists families of children with Cystic Fibrosis, Blythswood and the Knit-a-Square project. Many people responded by picking up their knitting needles, including Sharyon Hawes (*pictured below*). Working from her home in South Uist, Sharyon produced blankets, knitted squares, baby hats, jackets and booties. Alongside items made by Anne MacKinnon, Elizabeth MacKay and Jasmine Sutherland, Sharyon's squares will be sent to Knit-a-Square, where they will be assembled into blankets for vulnerable children in Africa. Volunteering from home allows people to fit activities around their own timetables, which can be especially valuable during the winter months.



For others, volunteering is about being part of a collective effort. Each July, more than 60 volunteers come together to create the Eilean Dorcha Festival. Their contribution begins long before the first performance, with planning meetings held throughout the year. On site, the set up crew work tirelessly to erect tents and secure the area, often in challenging weather. The box office team ensures that everything runs smoothly, while the green team keeps the site tidy throughout the event. Every role is essential to delivering a safe and welcoming festival for the community. One volunteer reflected, "Being part of the volunteer team at Eilean Dorcha Festival is one of the highlights of my year," a sentiment shared by many involved.

Volunteering also offers young people opportunities to learn skills and gain recognised awards. As part of her Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Morgan Bagley volunteered at Benbecula Thrift Shop. She said, "I have gained an insight into customer service and how much hard work goes in to being a volunteer." At Uist Community Riding School, a dedicated group of volunteers, including Maisie Wheeler (*above*), assist in all weathers. They are highly valued members of the equine team and, according to manager Shirley Manning, "We couldn't manage without them." Maisie is working towards a Saltire Award and is developing interpersonal skills and horsemanship experience that she hopes to carry into her future career.

The benefits of volunteering extend in both directions. As one volunteer at Uist and Barra Foodbank observed, "It's not a one-way thing, you get a lot back." Many volunteers describe a sense of purpose, belonging and connection that comes from giving their time.



The NHS identifies five steps to mental wellbeing: connecting with others, being physically active, learning new skills, giving to others and being mindful of the present moment. Volunteering can encompass all of these.

Whether offering a few hours occasionally or committing regularly, volunteers make a lasting difference. From a fireside in Uist to communities further afield, each contribution matters. To find out more about volunteering opportunities in Uist, please get in touch.

Anne Monk, VCWI Development Worker (Uist)
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PUTTING VOLUNTEERING AT THE HEART OF BUSINESS

The Volunteer Centre Western Isles is focused on growing Employer Supported Volunteering across the islands. This means businesses encouraging and enabling staff to volunteer, whether by offering paid time off during working hours, organising team volunteering days or building partnerships with local charities and community groups.

Employer Supported Volunteering helps strengthen the link between workplaces and their communities. It gives voluntary organisations valuable support, while offering employees the chance to use their skills in a different setting and contribute to causes they care about.

For businesses, there are clear benefits. Volunteering can boost team spirit, build confidence and develop skills such as communication and leadership. It can also improve staff wellbeing and job satisfaction. At the same time, local groups benefit from volunteers time and expertise.

If your business would like to look at ways of supporting the local community through Employer Supported Volunteering, please get in touch! info@volunteercentrewi.org



COMMUNITY STEPS UP

The **Harris Food Bank**, a self-serve facility based in the bus waiting room in Tarbert, has recently been topped up thanks to generous community support. Shelves have been refilled with a range of essential items, ensuring that supplies remain available for those who need them.

Grateful thanks are extended to everyone who has donated over the past few weeks. Contributions have been dropped off at the VCWI office and delivered directly to the shelving unit in the bus waiting area.

Every item received is greatly appreciated and makes a difference. Support from local councillors and the wider Harris community continues to play an important role in sustaining this initiative.

The food bank operates on a no referral basis, offering a straightforward approach. Anyone can take what they need, when they need it. Regular checks and restocking help to keep the shelves supplied.

Updates and further information can be found on Facebook, on the **Volunteer Centre Western Isles - Harris** page.



VOLUNTEER IN 2026!

VCWI kicked off 2026 with a social media campaign highlighting the personal and community benefits of volunteering.

The posts, shared on Facebook and Instagram, show how volunteering can build confidence, develop skills and strengthen wellbeing.

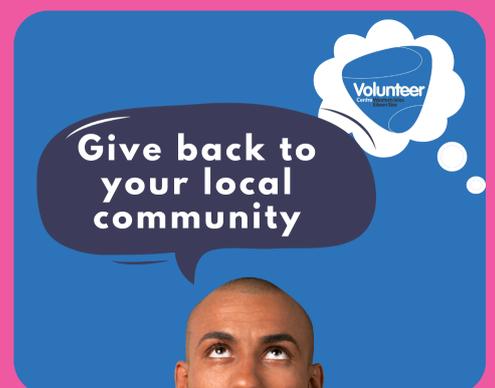
They also showcase the positive impact that volunteers have across the Western Isles, from



supporting organisations to enhancing essential services.

To find out about volunteering opportunities in **your** community, visit the VCWI website:

www.volunteercentrewi.org



SPRING CLEAN SCOTLAND 2026

This year, Spring Clean Scotland kicks off on Friday 13th March, with community groups and schools across the Western Isles preparing to take part. Organised nationally by **Keep Scotland Beautiful**, the #SpringCleanScotland campaign encourages people to come together to improve local surroundings and protect the environment.

Throughout the initiative, volunteers will be tidying villages, beaches and public spaces, helping to remove litter and enhance shared areas.

Volunteer Centre Western Isles has litter pickers available for community use. Groups planning a clean up can borrow equipment by contacting the local VCWI office or emailing: info@volunteercentrewi.org



SHINE WITH SALTIRE

Young people aged 11 to 25 who give their time to help others are encouraged to sign up for the **Saltire Awards**. Whether volunteering as part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, supporting a local charity or assisting a group they have previously been involved with, the Saltire Awards provide a clear and structured way to recognise their efforts.

The programme offers a simple system for recording volunteer hours, helping participants maintain an accurate account of their contribution. As milestones are reached, certificates are awarded to mark progress and celebrate achievement. This creates a record that can support future education, training or employment applications.

Volunteering allows young people to develop confidence, responsibility and practical skills while making a positive difference within their communities. The Saltire Awards ensure that this commitment is formally acknowledged. For full details on how to register and log hours, contact saltire@volunteercentrewi.org or visit www.saltireawards.scot

Pupils from **Sir E. Scott School** in Harris (*pictured right*) were recently presented with Saltire Award certificates at a prizegiving assembly, celebrating their volunteering achievements.

Some pupils are beginning their volunteering journey, reaching their first 10 hours and receiving an initial certificate to mark this important milestone.

For others, volunteering has become a sustained commitment. Bethany Macleod and Isabella Maclean were recognised for achieving their **200 hour** certificates, showing real dedication and generosity of time in support of local groups and activities.

The pupils have volunteered with many island organisations - from coaching at Harris FC to fundraising for Leverhulme Memorial School; being a technical assistant at the Stramash music festival to working with the animals at Callanish Alpacas; from crofting to church children's clubs and lots more. Some pupils volunteer with one organisation, while others spread their time across several different groups. The great thing about **Saltire Awards** is that every one of these volunteering hours counts!



CO-OP LOCAL COMMUNITY FUND

Volunteer Centre Western Isles is part of the latest round of the Co-op Local Community Fund, which has donated over £108m to 40,000 causes since it began in 2016.

Find out more about our project and choose us as your cause here:

membership.coop.co.uk/causes/96323

**CHOOSE US
AS YOUR
LOCAL CAUSE**

Co-op Members can support us through the Local Community Fund
membership.coop.co.uk/causes



SGOIL UIGE NEEDS YOU!

Are you a keen baker?

Do you know some traditional recipes?

Are you available on a Friday afternoon?

To get involved in the VCWI/Sgoil Uige intergenerational project, contact:

lewis@volunteercentrewi.org



FOLLOW VOLUNTEER CENTRE WESTERN ISLES ON SOCIALS

For volunteering opportunities:

volunteercentrewi.org

