Rural Wisdom Scotland evaluation 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS
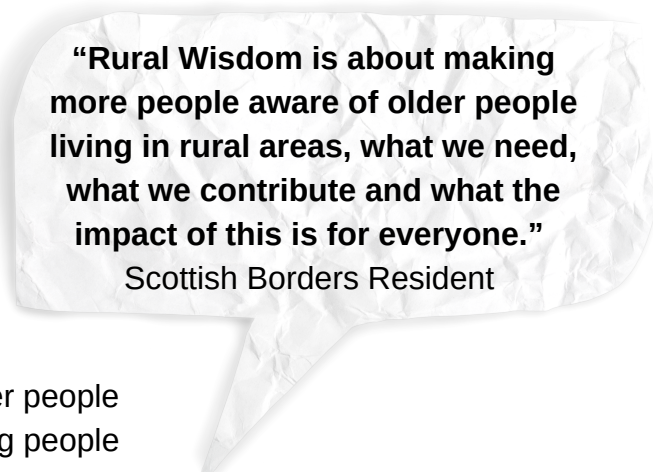
This evaluation was done by Louise Willson (Outside the Box), working with the team and communities across Scotland.

Older People Shaping Rural Communities

Rural Wisdom

Pobl H n yn Llunio Cymunedau Gwledig

Doethineb Gwledig

Introduction
About Rural Wisdom

Rural Wisdom is about improving the lives of older people living in rural communities by listening and helping people develop activities and initiatives.

Rural Wisdom is a five-year project working in rural communities in Scotland and Wales with funding secured from the National Lottery Community Fund in 2017. This evaluation explores the impact of the work in Scotland during 2021 for the last year of the project.

Stage one 2017- 19 the communities in Scotland were Eaglesham and Waterfoot, Highland Perthshire, and North Angus. The impact of the work with the first communities, has influenced the approaches, connections and learning across Rural Wisdom and the communities in Scotland.

Stage two 2019 - 2021 the communities are Burghead, Hopeman and Cummingston in Moray, and the Scottish Borders with a focus on the village of Newton St Boswells. Work and connections have also continued with the community and partner organisations in Eaglesham and Waterfoot.

Older people have told us that a key part of creating good rural communities for older people is about having communities, with facilities, activities, services and employment for everyone and for all ages. Good communities that benefit everyone work very well for older people too.

2021 has been the second year of the Covid19 global pandemic. Part of the work in communities has been about responding to the ongoing crisis and recovery with older people playing a crucial role in identifying and delivering community supports, activities and services.

It has also been about working differently, using digital connections and online platforms with more confidence to make and support friendships, seek ideas and solutions around the issues rural communities and older people face. The digital technologies have also given older people living in remote communities the opportunity to participate more easily, without the time and travel costs, in both local and area-based networks and forums, and Scotland and UK wide too. One example is participating in several sessions and discussions at the Scottish Rural Parliament and not spending two days travelling there and back.

About the rural communities

About the Scottish Borders

Scottish Borders is in the Southeast of Scotland and is made up of small towns and large remote rural areas. Rural Wisdom built upon the earlier work in the Borders by Outside the Box. The Happiness Habits and Flourishing Borders projects supported positive mental health and wellbeing, and ways to build supportive social connections in remote and isolated communities. Rural Wisdom has focussed on transport in rural communities and creating digital connections for older people with the Digital Buddies project.

Newton St Boswells is a small village with a few shops and facilities, set in the heart of the Borders about 4 miles from Melrose. The work in 2020 onwards has been around supporting and developing small easily accessible social and support activities that engage and connect older people with the whole community.

About Burghead, Hopeman and Cummingston in Moray

Moray is in the Northeast of Scotland. The most active areas for Rural Wisdom were in the coastal communities of Burghead, Hopeman and Cummingston, about 8 miles from the town of Elgin. Local people and organisations had previously taken part in Rural Wisdom workshops and used publications and found ideas from other places useful. They wanted to take forward ideas that they had been developing over the past few years around energy and climate change, transport and accessing community spaces in remote communities.

About Eaglesham and Waterfoot

Eaglesham and Waterfoot are villages in East Renfrewshire with a population of under 4,000 people. There is only a mile between the two villages. They are connected by sharing provisions like community council, library, school, and a few local shops. They are close to large urban areas where the main services are located, but public transport to them is limited.
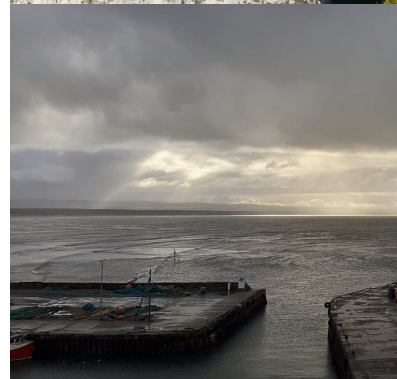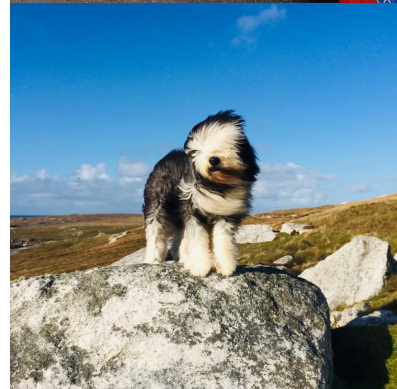
About the evaluation

In early 2021 we co-created new project outcomes for the final year of the work for Rural Wisdom. We developed an online survey and held two digital conversations. People participated from Wales and Scotland. They included, individuals, community groups and organisations in Rural Wisdom communities, partner and support organisations and Rural Wisdom workers.

The digital conversations and survey focussed on what people would like Rural Wisdom to achieve in its final year and explored what a good rural community looks like for older people. The new outcomes people came up with were consistent with the initial outcomes. They reflected the new circumstances of the ongoing pandemic as well as how the project had developed over the previous four years.

The Outcomes

The outcomes across the work are focussed into 4 areas
- Communities are busy, welcoming places for older people with the infrastructure and community-based services to support people in a way that works for them
- Older people have a voice and lead change and influence policies to support older people to continue to live in rural communities
- Learning is embedded locally and is shared across the UK to help foster communities that value, include, and support older people
- Older people are valued part of the Covid recovery, supports and reconnection

The evaluation was carried out by

- reviewing Rural Wisdom materials and resources such as website, blogs, biteable animations and newsletters
- conversations with rural wisdom workers and people living in rural wisdom communities and partner organisations
- observing and participating in Rural Wisdom workers meetings, and reflection and review sessions
- observing and participating in digital starter conversations and activities

The evaluation has gathered examples and conversational quotes to demonstrate that the outcomes have been achieved. They also highlight unexpected outcomes, impacts for people and communities, and shared learning.

Outcomes

from the
Rural Wisdom
Evaluation

The evidence gathered in this qualitative review shows that the stage two areas for Rural Wisdom Scotland have had a very positive impact on the lives of people and the communities they live in. A few examples are used to illustrate each outcome area.

"I'm so happy that my ideas have made other people happy and have bought the community back. People are offering to help now, and everyone wants to join in more and are thinking of what they can do." Rural Wisdom Worker

"The community is knitting together nicely; everyone wants to join in more and there are things to talk about now and also to do without travelling miles. Rural Wisdom Worker

Follow the links to jump to the outcome you're interested in:

- Communities are busy, welcoming, supportive places for older people
- Older people have a voice and lead change
- Sharing learning to help foster communities that value and include older people
- Older people are valued part of the Covid recovery and reconnection

Outcome: Communities are busy, welcoming places for older people with the infrastructure and community-based services to support people in a way that works for them

Scottish Borders - Newton St Boswells

Government guidance around Covid 19 in October 2020 made Halloween guising impossible. Instead, a pumpkin trail was created through the village with goody- bags for children donated by community members. The rural wisdom worker shared photos of the pumpkins and stories of older people participating in the pumpkins trail on local social media pages.

In October 2021 for Halloween people were invited to make 'no cost scarecrows' using recycled and repurposed materials. This time there was no need to create a trail for people and families to follow because people in the village did it themselves. They went for walks around the village, taking photos, sharing their favourite scarecrows. They created a trail for others to follow in person or from the comfort of their home. The next outing for the scarecrows will be December when they are going to be repurposed and reused for Christmas decorations in the village.

"We started in Covid and just thought of simple easy ways for people to make connections and join in when they could" Rural Wisdom Worker

"It's created a community feel there is excitement about what we will do next and how people can get involved" Newton St Boswells Resident

"I look forward to the next event, whether it is Halloween or Easter and the quizzes have been so good. It gives you something to do and think about and then talk with people about." Newton St Boswells Resident

"Its such easy fun that we can all take part in and it's got all ages talking to each other and it stops us thinking about the virus and the things we can't do any more." Newton St Boswells Resident

Outcome: Communities are busy and welcoming

Moray - Burghead, Hopeman and Cummingston

During the last year, older people in the three coastal communities have started having different conversations, within existing groups and forums, around what kindness and compassion in communities looks like. Building upon the earlier work around community transport and energy issues and the desire to involve more people. The conversations began with older people talking together but have now been widened out to include all ages and the whole community in the conversation.

The creation of a small community bus service, partly in response to the closure of local GP surgeries, is an example of brilliant partnership work across the area, as way of organising community-based services to support communities. It is also a good example of the shared learning across the whole Rural Wisdom project. With local Moray groups being introduced to Welsh colleagues at Pembrokeshire Association for Community Transport Organisations (PACTO) to explore ways to replicate the 'Take Me Too' lift sharing initiative. This transport initiative helps people get around and access vital services, supports, and activities in the local area. The bus committee is made up of local people, Moray Council, TSI Moray, and Rural Wisdom, all committed to connecting communities physically, socially and intergenerationally. The initiative also became part of the local COVID response by transporting people to vaccination centres in Lossiemouth.

"Covid highlighted the need to work together."
Burghead Resident

"We have been talking about kindness and compassion in communities and thinking about what makes a good place for everyone. Its clear to us that strong communities have a place for everyone and especially young people." Rural Wisdom worker

Outcome: Older people have a voice and lead change and influence policies to support older people to continue to live in rural communities

Scottish Borders - Newton St Boswells

"Before Rural Wisdom there hadn't been much happening in the village for a while that you could just be part of. It was great that older people were part of helping to change this. We started getting involved and responding to the things that were happening and then the rest of community joined in too." Newton St Boswells resident

"I have tried eating things I would never have before as I didn't know what to use them in" Newton resident

"Community spirit and being able to chat to people we have never met before" Newton resident

"It's helped a lot of people and me and the kids for that matter" Newton resident

During the pandemic lockdown the community buildings were closed to the public. This stopped all social activities in the village, but it also meant that the food bank and community larder couldn't operate either – leaving people in a very difficult situation.

During the spring and summer Rural Wisdom used a gazebo, referred to locally as 'the tents', as a base for people to help themselves to the things they needed. This approach proved to be much easier and more accessible for people. It reduced stigma because people also dropped off things or made swaps. It became a hub for people to meet and chat safely sheltered outside and social distanced.

Outcome: Older people have a voice and lead change

Moray - Burghead, Hopeman and Cummingston

Older people in the coastal villages first highlighted the issue of energy and fuel use in Moray. Energy use impacts everyone but it is particularly an issue for people on low and fixed incomes. It was raised during local conversations with local groups and forums, and with people using shops and community facilities. A survey around energy and fuel issues received an overwhelming response and provided vital information which has since been shared at conferences and with Home Energy Scotland and the local MSP. An Energy Advice Event was held on a Saturday morning to share information and support, and access information around things like increasing insulation, reducing fuel use, climate change and maximizing income.

The event was also an opportunity for people to talk and think about options and working together. Climate change and energy issues continue to be an area of action for the community and have resulted in the creation of a Development Trust and inclusion in the Scottish Government's 'Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies' (LHEES). The approach has been shared across the Rural Wisdom communities in Scotland and Wales.

"More older people will be warm next winter" Moray Resident

"We had a virtual event to share how fuel poverty and renewable energy are being taken on by people in Moray and at Renew Wales." Rural Wisdom Worker

"It's good to see what's possible and that give us ideas" Moray Resident

Outcome: Older people have a voice and lead change

Eaglesham and Waterfoot

The Rural Wisdom work in Eaglesham and Waterfoot has resulted in greater community connections for older people within the villages. For example, older people have taken a lead role in the 'Chatty café', community notice board and community newspaper - all things that have helped to share news and make local social connections.

Older people in the villages are more connected and involved in the wider area and East Renfrewshire with for example events and activities for the whole area being held locally. Older people are also part of bigger conversations in East Renfrewshire and nationally about how services respond to keep people well at home.

"It has changed how we work. Before Rural Wisdom we would never have held events in Eaglesham. It's a project of opportunities for individuals, communities and for HSCP - it's made such a difference to our knowledge and understanding of the community and the people who live there." HSCP East Renfrewshire

"You can't change communities if you don't involve everyone." Eaglesham and Waterfoot resident
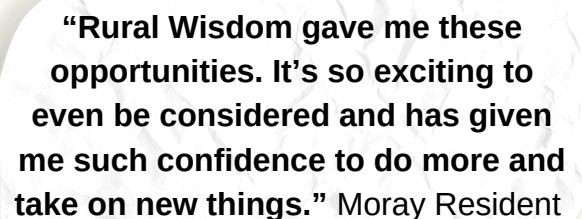
Outcome: Learning is embedded locally and is shared across the UK to help foster communities that value, include and support older people

The learning has been embedded locally using a few different approaches.

Learning from the work in Eaglesham, a local anchor approach has been used for ideas and projects to be sustain. For example, anchoring work with a local café and few interested residents for the development of the 'Chatty café' for people to have a coffee and chat and not have it in a local community centre.

Newton St Boswells approach for small social activities as a way to bring people together first but also develop activities and ideas that can be taken forward simply and easily by others.

Local people taking on different and expanding roles. For example, in Moray one of the residents who has been involved in the energy and climate change work has been invited to apply to become a member on a Scottish Government working group.

> **"Rural Wisdom gave me these opportunities. It's so exciting to even be considered and has given me such confidence to do more and take on new things."** Moray Resident

Using existing structures and building strong partnerships. There are examples from both Moray and Scottish Borders of the local work and ideas connecting with existing structures and building strong partnerships to continue to take ideas forward.
In the Scottish Borders there are continuing partnerships with Borders Older Peoples Forum, Eildon Housing Association, Berwickshire Housing Association, Borders Care Voice and Older Peoples Champion to ensure local support for older people to lead the way.

Supporting new partnerships and connections to develop alongside existing partnership structures. As a result of community activities and Rural Wisdom connections Eaglesham and Waterfoot are integrated in East Renfrewshire's community responses with the Health and Social Care Partnership and 60 organisations supporting health and wellbeing across the local authority area.

Rural Wisdom communities also participated in the Community Solution discussions with Healthcare Improvement Scotland. They shared their ideas and experiences of community responses to Covid and how to make communities resilient and good places for people to grow old. They also contributed and influenced the materials and resources produced to support this work.

Outcome: Shared learning to help foster communities that value and include older people

Connecting people, organisations and communities as a way of sharing ideas, solutions and approaches has been a key part of the Rural Wisdom approach. Some key examples from Moray include:

- Transport enhancing the whole community – Rural Wisdom Moray exploring with Pembrokeshire Association for Community Transport Organisations (PACTO) the 'Take Me Too' lift sharing initiative. Taking an approach from one country and sharing and developing it in another and then sharing with others how they approached it.

- Climate change and Energy issues - holding a virtual event with Rural Wisdom communities in Wales and partners such as Renew Wales, to share the energy use and fuel poverty approach in Moray.

- Connecting and supporting local groups like Energising Moray and The Fairer Moray Forum Action group with resources and ideas.

Learning and resources from Rural Wisdom are shared across the UK in a range of ways:

• Rural Wisdom website and blogs - supported by Outside the Box, Volunteering Matters Cymru and NDTi. Visit the Rural Wisdom website at www.ruralwisdom.org.

• Holding virtual conversation starters on key topics. You can watch the conversation webinars on the Rural Wisdom website.

• Developing and producing resources to support communities and individuals take forward ideas and initiatives.

• Holding a virtual learning event to share key learning from Rural Wisdom

• Developing 'biteable' animations around key themes and approaches.
- Older people and Social action
- Climate change and rural communities
- Community Transport solutions
- Rural Wisdom themes
- Social care and wellbeing

You can watch all of the animations at www.ruralwisdom.org.

Outcome: Older people are a valued part of the Covid recovery, supports and reconnection

"It's a crisis but shows what can be done and it brings out the best"
Rural Wisdom worker

"He is such a whizz on the iPad, he taught me how to use Siri… we have great fun asking her all sorts of random questions."
Scottish Borders resident

"It's great having a buddy, she doesn't do it for me like my family used to! She shows me how to do it and it's OK if I don't remember she just shows me again - She is so patient" Scottish Borders resident

Rural Wisdom communities in Scotland have been a crucial part of Covid recovery, supports and reconnection. Some examples include:

- The enhanced community transport approach in Hopeman run and organised by older people for everyone became a crucial community service for people in remote communities wanting to get shopping for themselves and neighbours, and attend medical appointments and vaccinations.
- The digital connections made some rural communities more accessible and able to participate in networks and forums locally, regionally, and nationally, such as Moray PEG, Moray Climate Assembly, Burghead Steering Group meetings, Hopeman Community Bus AGM and attend conferences such as Scottish Highlands and Islands Rural Economy conference, and Scottish Rural Parliament sessions.
- Rural Wisdom virtual conversation starters and national gatherings have become a national platform that allow people to have direct conversations with key staff in local and national government.
- Digital Buddies is an innovative project developed in the Scottish Borders that supports older people to use digital technologies to make connections with family and friends and to participate in virtual public life. It matches older people with local buddies to provide informal support to learn the skills and confidence to use the new technologies.

Unexpected Outcomes

An unexpected outcome has been the ideas and spin off projects that have come from Rural Wisdom community ideas and approaches.

Digital Buddies

Digital access became an increasingly important issue during 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Digital Buddies project supports older people in the Scottish Borders to digitally connect to friends, family, groups, their communities & the wider world. They are supported by a Buddy (friend, family member or another community member) as well as given the technology to get started. The buddies have allowed the project to take a very personalised approach and support older people to do what's important to them, that's everything from online shopping to community council meetings, to Netflix.

The buddy approach has also been developed in other areas offering informal digital buddy support in different locations such as rural Perthshire. In the Scottish Borders the approach has been used to support an intergenerational gardening project and to support people to build confidence to get back into community life after the pandemic.

Community Newspaper

Increasing community connections was a keen theme in the work in Eaglesham a stage one Rural Wisdom area. The work has continued over the last few years with the development of a community newspaper, organised and run by older people for older people. People liked the idea of an old-fashioned paper being available locally with positive news stories. The newspaper is now supported by the whole community with people giving stories and requesting information. Younger people are also participating wanting to share skills and gain experience. The newspaper was started for older people but now everyone in the community is benefitting.

Shared learning and impacts

Some examples of shared learning and impacts include

- The opportunities of participating locally in small social initiatives has a positive impact on individuals' confidence and mental health and wellbeing resulting in positive impacts in other aspects of their lives. For example, from Newton St Boswells participating in new and different activities such as making scarecrows and taking part in community quizzes.

- The opportunities to participate in regional and national networks and forums, supports individuals and small communities to have a wider reach and also to learn and share from other places.

- People participating in their local community has benefits for the individuals and local community. It can also lead to people being part of bigger conversations, in the wider area about how services respond to keep people well at home. This has been made even easier as more and more meetings and discussion are held online. Older people from the Rural Wisdom communities have also participated nationally in online discussions, for example the Community Solutions events with Healthcare Improvement Scotland during the spring of 2021 that explored community responses and solutions during Covid.

- The opportunities to connect and share ideas and solutions with people from different places but with similar circumstances also has a positive impact on people's lives. It increases understanding that they are not alone with their circumstances and that people have solutions and ideas that they can share and develop.

- Taking time to listen to people creatively and ask people about options and solutions results in different approaches to issues. Such as in Moray thinking about reducing energy use and climate change, involves more people, organisations and potential partners in the issue and allows for greater options that help everyone.

- Older people throughout the Rural Wisdom areas have told us that what makes a good place for older people to live in, is a place with a strong community for people of all ages, with facilities, spaces, transport and businesses that work and benefit all people.
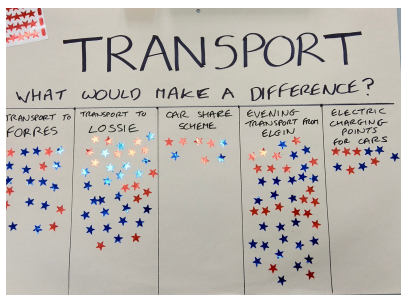
Overall

The assessment of the impact of the Rural Wisdom stage 2 areas is based on how well the four outcomes are being achieved. Rural Wisdom has achieved its outcomes of:

- Communities are busy, welcoming places for older people with the infrastructure and community-based services to support people in a way that works for them

- Older people have a voice and lead change and influence policies to support older people to continue to live in rural communities

- Learning is embedded locally and is shared across the UK to help foster communities that value, include and support older people

- Older people are valued part of the Covid recovery, supports and reconnection

- The shared learning that will be taken forward

- Taking a slower listening approach to working alongside communities and individuals, exploring different responses and solutions that work for the wider community, such as energy and climate change instead of fuel poverty.

- The approach to social action for transport and energy for communities are being used in other communities and shared with other communities, organisations and networks.

- Networking and learning with the other areas also includes the small things and the social activities such as the Scottish communities using the Welsh knitting patterns for Easter chicks.

- Connecting and sharing approaches and models from one country to another will continue, such as the enhanced community support model from Pembrokeshire and the PIVOT supporting people home from hospital

- Supporting staff conversations around ideas and approaches using digital technologies - supporting staff to continue with other projects

- A wider understanding of what makes a good community for older people and ways to ensure that older people are listened and engaged both locally and nationally.

Thank you to everyone in the Rural Wisdom communities!

More information

Outside the Box, Volunteering Matters Cymru and the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) hope that you find the learning from Rural Wisdom shared here useful.

Visit www.ruralwisdom.org for more information and learning.

Scotland Evaluation Contact
Louise Willson
Depute Chief Executive,
Louise@otbds.org

Wales Contact
Dr Victoria Mason-Angelow
Research and Evaluation Consultant
Victoria.Mason-Angelow@ndti.org.uk