



OUTSIDE THE BOX ANNUAL REPORT 2023

OUTSIDE THE BOX IS A CHARITY AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE. WE BEGAN IN 2004 AND HAVE GROWN TO SUPPORT PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES ACROSS SCOTLAND .

WE HELP BUILD STRONG, INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES, BY CREATING THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT ENABLE THIS VISION TO BECOME REALITY.

YOU CAN FIND OUT
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WORK BY VISITING
www.otbds.org

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WE WORK ALONGSIDE PEOPLE TO CREATE STRONG, INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES.

OUTSIDE THE BOX 2023

In 2023, we continued to support people and groups across Scotland, in their efforts to create sustainable, connected and welcoming communities. We know things work best when communities can get together, share learning, and include everyone's ideas and strengths. We have been supporting this by helping communities connect, adapt, navigate challenges, create resources, hold welcoming events, find new ideas, set up new projects, and make a positive impact to everyone's lives.

THIS YEAR WE...

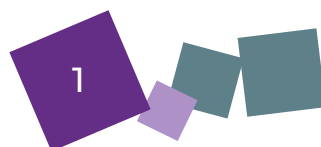
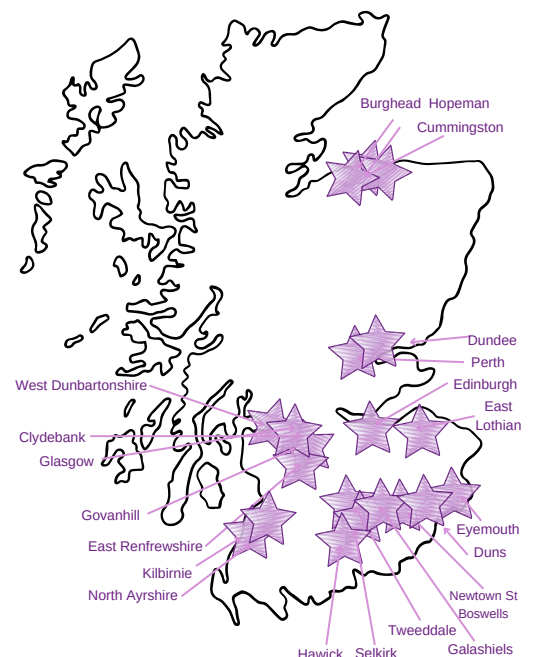
Supported the work of more than 100 community groups and organisations, helping them find sustainable ways to make a positive impact.

Worked together with over 1000 people across Scotland, creating opportunities for them to have their voices heard and be involved in shaping their communities.

Reached thousands more people who benefitted from this work by taking part in new local activities, forums and groups, and using resources we helped develop.

Worked with community knowledge to produce useful resources, from our booklet on ways to support each other around the cost of living, to recipes, to guides on making spaces welcoming for diverse groups of older people.

Contributed to wider policy networks and conversations, supporting community members to take part and raise issues they care about.



“ Welcome to the Outside the Box annual report for 2023. This year we had the chance to work with many wonderful people and projects, helping them to achieve their goals. Our development support work included:

- Supporting a voluntary group to become an independent charity.
- Supporting a membership organisation for people with learning disabilities with their governance and planning.
- Helping teams and employers to create Family Friendly workplaces. We worked with a local authority in England to develop small and sustainable changes that support working parents at work and at home.
- Carrying out inclusive evaluations for organisations to show the incredible impact of their work and to include voices not always heard in evaluations.
- Promoting everyday climate action by supporting communities who tend to be excluded from climate discussions. We helped people find ways to be involved and make a difference, creating a ripple of positive impacts.

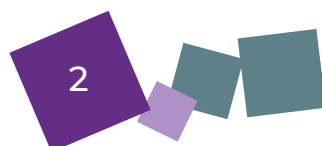
Our project work, underpinned by equalities and human rights, was another big focus. Highlights from this year include:

- Borders Buddies - supporting and matching people to volunteer buddies who help them reconnect to community and do the things they enjoy.
- Moments of Freedom - working alongside New Scots women with open, collaborative planning to build community leadership and connections.
- Queer Families - providing space for LGBTQI+ families to connect, support each other through barriers, and find creative ways to address gaps.
- Connecting Equalities – working with diverse older people and communities, to explore everyday human rights and equalities, and connect to decision-makers and media so they can be fully involved.

And these are only a few examples of our 2023 work to support inclusive, thriving community activities, services, leadership, and learning. Thank you to the staff and board for their tremendous hard work and creativity that supports our work and makes a difference to people’s lives. And thank you all the partners – from the biggest services to the tiniest community groups – supporters, community members and friends of Outside the Box who make the work possible. Everything worth doing is best done together!

”

Louise Willson,
Chief Executive, Outside the Box



MOMENTS OF FREEDOM

Moments of Freedom, led by New Scot women resettled in Clydebank – is a safe space for women to come together to be themselves, make connections, share their skills and expertise to shape their local community for the meaningful integration of their families.

The group had an extremely busy year hosting community events, visiting other New Scots in different local authorities and meeting with their elected representatives. The women hosted a community coffee afternoon as part of Refugee Festival Week on World Refugee Day in June. The women invited local elected members, council representatives, community members and representatives from other Scottish organisations. Around 60 people came together to chat over a variety of traditional Syrian drinks, including the women's famous coffee. Guests were asked to decorate fabric squares with their messages or feelings of Hope – the theme of the Refugee Festival – which have now been made into bunting for the women to display at events.

We value all the partnerships and associations that we have been able to nurture over this past year – particularly those with the local elected representatives who have spent a lot of time with the group. The women arranged sessions with both Marie McNair MSP and local Councillors Lauren Oxley and Clare Steel. This allowed the women to get casework assistance with the help of the group's interpreter and feed back to elected representatives what is working well and not so well for them in West Dunbartonshire. After the session the women discussed that they feel that are listened to at Council and Parliament level and more in control of their own lives.

If you're keen to know more about the project or have ideas about working in partnership, please get in touch – we would love to hear from you.

“ Since I joined the Moments of Freedom group, my self-confidence has increased, my skills have developed, and my language has also improved. I am very happy to join this wonderful group. ”

“ I wish more communities had groups like Moments of Freedom. ”

“ These events make such a difference to the whole area. They're a chance to value everybody. ”

“ It was good to see different community partners there, just enjoying the event along with group members and their families. I also learnt that I enjoy Arabic coffee! ”

“ “I feel powerful, people listen to me now” ”

“ Sharing food is so important. ”



Thanks to funding and support from West Dunbartonshire Council and the Robertson Trust.

SCOTS SYRIAN ROSES

Outside the Box began to work with the New Scots women's group, Scots Syrian Roses, in May 2023. Scots Syrian Roses are a women's community group of Syrian New Scots who have resettled in North Ayrshire. We worked alongside the group to explore meaningful integration, their valuable contributions to community life, shared learning, networking and more. Over the summer we focused on building trust and understanding between Outside the Box staff and the women attending the group. We facilitated creative visual arts workshops and nature activities for the women. We visited Eglinton Park for a wellbeing walk and the women brought together over 50 women from across North Ayrshire for a Syrian barbecue. The group also hosted a Syrian breakfast for the women of Moments of Freedom and welcomed them into their community centre with traditional dancing and music.

Into the autumn and winter the sessions focused on identifying small, practical, but meaningful steps that the group could undertake. The women had a workshop on immigration and family reunion as part of the Public Legal Education sessions offered by Strathclyde University Law Clinic. The women also worked with Heriot Watt PhD student Leri Price on her research project focusing on what 'home' means to New Scots Syrian women. Over the length of the project, we worked with the women to increase their community connections, access to services and enhance their women's group activities.



“ It was very good to meet the Moments of Freedom group, we can see that they are very busy and do a lot in their community. ”

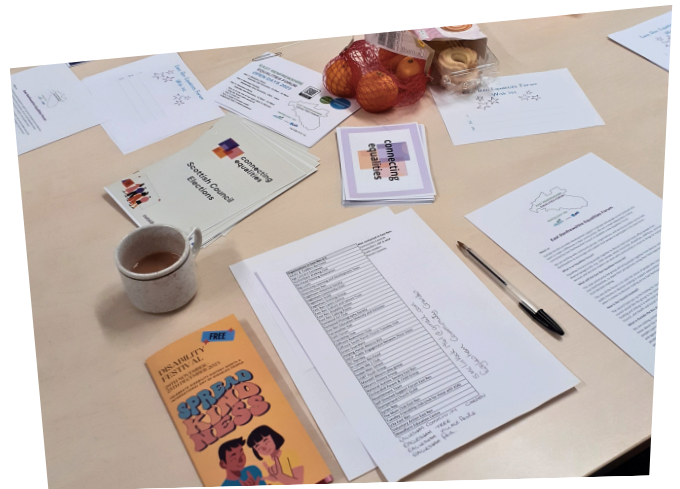
“ We are very busy – especially looking after our children. This is a time for us to come together and also relax and talk about what we want for us and our future. ”

“ We would like to have them to our community centre – maybe go to the beach and talk about what we all do. ”



EAST RENFREWSHIRE EQUALITIES FORUM

We were contracted by East Renfrewshire Council for six months to create a new community-led Equalities Forum for the area. The Forum will bring people together from diverse communities across East Renfrewshire to share their perspectives and bring their experiences to link in with local decision-making. As an independent facilitator, our role in this process involved meeting members of the community, local organisations, and services, and delivering events and online surveys to gather opinions and discuss how a Forum could work. At these meetings, we were identifying why the Forum is needed, what people want it to achieve, who needs to be involved, how it will be run and how Forum members ensure it is community-led. All feedback and ideas contributed to a Terms of Reference document which was produced at the end of the process. This will provide a foundation for the Forum to get started and help community members to develop and grow this new network.



“ We really need something like this for East Ren. We’re looking forward to taking part. ”

You can find further information about the Forum on our website or you can email listening@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk.

Climate Chat



We started working with communities on the Climate Chat project in 2023 thanks to Scottish Government Climate Engagement funding. The project's aim was to chat with communities, focusing on equalities groups, in engagement activities around climate action. We supported them to undertake small but practical everyday actions to reduce their carbon footprint, and to talk about what they were doing and how they felt about climate change. It's important that everyone in the community can feel like they can do their own wee bit to help fight the climate crisis. For the past 4 years we have worked alongside small groups living in Moray and the Borders on climate action activity. We have been building on this and taking our learning and approaches to other groups across Scotland who have been traditionally marginalised from mainstream climate activity. We engaged with adults with learning disabilities, families on low incomes, older people in remote rural areas, LGBTQ+ families and New Scots women about their experiences and feelings around the environment, and on taking climate action forward as whole communities.

The project helped people to:

- Improve climate literacy, in terms of understanding what climate change means for them and their community and what actions Scotland is taking.
- Increase confidence and positive feelings about talking to others about climate change and action, and having a voice at a local and national level.
- Increase practical understanding and engagement in actions they can take in their daily life and in their local communities on climate change and where to find information and advice.

“Making greener changes to the group like buying plastic reusable cups, cutlery, and refreshments in bulk has saved the group so much money and helped them become much more sustainable”



Consultation, evaluation and development support

Supporting inclusive community consultations, evaluation, and development is a big part of how we work to help communities thrive.

Over the past year we've supported a wide variety of organisations, all working to have positive impacts on their communities across the UK. It's part of our values to share our experience with helping organisations get started, incorporate, develop sustainable ways of working, value their teams, connect with their wider networks, and include everyone. Here are some of the ways our consultation and development support has made a difference in the past year.

Inclusive community consultation

Good consultation is a powerful tool, connecting people and valuing their knowledge. We've continued to do consultations tailored to each context, building on strengths and making sure people feel listened to. Our consultations have helped organisations gather evidence for funding applications, and create plans that reflect the priorities. Working with skilled graphic facilitators also helps us capture conversations and create local plans and roadmaps.



Evaluations and evaluation supports

Evaluations can be simple, meaningful, and empowering. They are a good way to show the difference work is making and the impact for communities and people. This year, in person or online, we've continued to use creative methods to involve everyone and share the outcomes and learning. It's been lovely working across Scotland, from rural villages to the big cities, to support robust, useful evaluations.

“

Outside the Box helped us to shape our ideas and priorities and also made sure that the quietest voices were heard.

”

Moray resident

Development support

Since Outside the Box began in 2004, we have supported a huge variety of organisations and community groups to develop in sustainable, inclusive ways. We have continued to support projects (from neighbourhood groups to bigger collaborations) with their funding plans and applications, governance, strategic planning, mapping community needs, strengths and priorities, setting up strong, trusting partnerships, working with interpreters and translators, and more.

Get in touch

If you would like to discuss how Outside the Box could support your work, you can get in touch with us by emailing Christine@otbds.org or using our contact form (www.otbds.org/contact).

LINKS EYEMOUTH



Building sustainable, local networks to make sure everyone can access enough good food, and enjoy being in a supportive community for sharing and learning.

LINKS Eyemouth has continued to grow and evolve in 2023 to meet the needs of the families in and around the Eyemouth area. The Cost of Living, reducing energy, reducing food waste, saving money and the climate were all highlighted by the families as areas of importance to them. Slow cooking courses in partnership with Abundant Borders, Saving Energy sessions in partnership with Changeworks, Reusing and Remaking sessions with ReTweed and Christmas for Less sessions in partnership with the Early Years Centre and Healthy Living Network were held in various locations throughout Berwickshire. The families told us they wanted sessions that they could bring their school age children along to, so we created the Friday After School Club which proved to be a huge hit with all the places filled and a waiting list in place most weeks. A mixture of cooking and craft sessions were held fortnightly throughout most of 2023.

Our families continued to receive the ever-popular monthly recipe bags with demand as high as ever. The closed Facebook group continued to grow with new families joining each week. Another ask from our families was for adult only cooking classes. This was made possible with additional funding through Multiply, where in the winter of 2023 we started an 8-week cooking course using cooking as a way to raise confidence around basic numeracy, maths and budgeting in a fun, interactive way for the adults who came along.



Thanks to funding from Dronehill Windfarm Fund and National Lottery (Together for a Better Planet) with support from NHS Borders.

Borders Buddies

Building networks of social connection and support in the Borders.

Thanks to National Lottery Improving Lives funding, Borders Buddies has strengthened over the last year, building its reach in Tweeddale and Hawick. The project was originally piloted post-Covid, as a way of helping people to get reconnected – to each other, or to the wider community, in small ways that felt safe for them.

People have been supported by volunteer Buddies to do things they want to do again; this might be just going out for a coffee and a chat, attending a group or taking part in a local heritage project. We supported one person to build connections through walking in his local area, and to get the bus to neighbouring towns. Our oldest volunteer Buddy is now supporting a second person to get out in his local area for walks and chats. One person who was supported has now built the confidence to go on and volunteer elsewhere, helping another group of older people. Our volunteers and those supported do not fit one category, they can be all ages and abilities. Sometimes we signpost people to services or support they were not aware of, for example one school leaver who is now volunteering in the community garden and studying horticulture. We are also finding that other groups and organisations are coming to us for advice about setting up a Buddy project, to support people to attend their own groups. Many of the people we support come to us via other services who do not have the capacity or remit to support people one to one on a longer term basis.



Thanks to funding and support from Tweeddale Community Fund.



Coastal Connections

“ Gives me confidence in assisting events at the local community centre. ”

In 2023 we supported groups and organisations across coastal areas to work in ways that build connections, wellbeing, and capacity – contributing to longer-term sustainability and resilience. We supported and co-hosted 3 climate fair events with local partners Zero Carbon Moray and REAP. Information stalls, discussions, and presentations gave local people opportunities to find out what was happening locally and how to get involved and support local climate action. We developed a series of wellbeing activities to help sustain social connections through summer months when the winter social hubs were off, working with local workers to hold painting, drumming, singing and crafts activities.



Working with the Hopeman Community Bus we supported the development of a new bus route – linking isolated communities with much needed services provided through the Post Office. This also creates opportunities for social interaction, sharing information, and staying connected with wider community. We worked with a local arts organisation Wildbird Youth Group, and Burghead Primary School to deliver film and sound workshops. These led to a short film made by young people, made in answer to the question “what’s it like to live in Burghead?” sharing favourite spaces in their community and what they would like to see happen locally. We supported three members of the Coastal Connections steering group to join our Parliamentary reception in March to present their work and highlight the community-led efforts of coastal Moray, and in particular the contributions of older people in these communities. We also worked in partnership with Moray Council to provide Food Hygiene training to local volunteers. This was in response to issues raised by volunteers and local committees about lack of volunteer training. After the success of the food hygiene training, volunteers requested First Aid Training, which was delivered with Beeline Community Transport.



In December 2023 we hosted an end of project celebration. It brought together over 30 local people involved in organising or participating in the activities over the past two years. We are pleased the project highlighted the immeasurable benefits of collaborative working and that it’s continuing organically in communities through the connections we helped to establish.



Thanks to funding from The National Lottery Community Fund Community-led programme, made possible by National Lottery players.



Connecting Equalities



In 2023 we have grown our Connecting Equalities work with new and existing partners across Scotland. We continue to work with New Beginnings Club in East Lothian by providing ongoing support to members, including a planning day to generate new ideas, and we supported Caddonfoot Kurlers as they welcomed a new member from one of the other groups we work with, Borders Buddies. We developed our partnerships in North Ayrshire with HSCP, TACT and Arran CVS to deliver human rights training sessions to community members and local organisations.

In March, we invited community members, charities, Councillors and MSPs to a reception at the Scottish Parliament to showcase our Connecting Equalities work. 50 guests, including 8 MSPs, enjoyed canapes and chat, and heard directly from some of the groups we have supported through this project, bringing the work to life and celebrating our progress so far. Our new Connecting Equalities resources for 2023 were 'Your right to complain' and 'Contacting your elected representatives', as well as a report from our work in North Ayrshire. In October, we responded to the Scottish Human Rights Bill consultation and continued our role as Secretariat of the Cross-Party Group on Older People, Age and Ageing, while remaining an active member of the Older People Strategic Action Forum.

"You've been instrumental in getting the community bus going, which goes along the coast, which is run by volunteers. So that's all very, very important. The fact that Outside the Box is helping us connect with neighbouring communities, which we didn't have time to do before. We're looking at the issues we have as issues that affect the whole area that need to be solved, that we can solve better by working together, it's making a big difference."

Thanks to funding from the Scottish Government as part of the Promoting Equality and Cohesion Fund and Equalities and Human Rights Fund

“ This takes collaborative working at a place scale to a different level in realising tangible benefits to communities. This has an impact on improving wellbeing, relationships, adaptability and a whole host of great stuff! ”



Families Supporting Families

Peer support and community among LGBTQI+ parents, carers and families.

In 2023 the Queer Families peer-support group kept growing, meeting monthly and welcoming lots of new families. Since the group started in 2018, participants have told us that having a relaxed, family-friendly monthly space to meet and have good conversations each month makes a big difference. Supporting each other can help people through different life experiences, discrimination and stresses, and find ways to feel more included in their communities.

We had lots of creative fun this year too - making postcards to send positive messages, making 'leaf rainbows' in the park, potato printing on tote bags, and more. It was lovely to become more connected with other groups too, and meet lots of people at the Pride Outside festival in the summer.



“ It takes a village to raise a child, we need supportive queer community around us. These spaces to meet and support each other are so important. ”



Family Friendly Workplaces

Supporting organisations to work in family-friendly ways for everyone's benefit

In 2018 we started a piece of work learning from working mums' and families' experiences, sharing good practice, and supporting employers to make simple changes. We worked with small businesses and their employees to explore challenges they face, and what kinds of support and practice make the most difference. Lots of the solutions we tried out together – like making pregnancy and parental leave policies clear, accessible and inclusive, and welcoming people returning to work - are simple, low-cost, and can make a big difference to employees' wellbeing.

In the years since then, we've developed our approach to supporting workplaces – from holding these sensitive, important conversations about pregnancy, work, parenting and caring, to putting together impactful interventions based on employee's experiences and our understanding of what works. We've combined our initial research with knowledge gained from working with single parent families, LGBTQI+ families, families who are new to Scotland, and parents and carers who are disabled or living with long term health conditions. We take an inclusive, whole-family approach, supporting employers to think about how different experiences and protected characteristics connect. There's no 'typical' family, so it's important to create practices which work for everyone by listening, expecting diversity, and being flexible.

We know that if family-friendly working practices are ignored, gender inequality widens, discrimination is more likely, and skilled employees leave the workplace. So we've been working with different organisations to support their teams and managers to explore what they need, and take simple steps to succeed.

It's been a joy to support people with the free resources we created, such as pregnancy timelines for managers and employees, videos and learning materials around preventing different kinds of discrimination, and our team's in-depth understanding – and we look forward to supporting more organisations next year!

family 
friendly
workplace



THANK YOU

THE WORK THAT OUTSIDE THE BOX DOES TO BUILD STRONG INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES RIGHT ACROSS SCOTLAND WOULDN'T BE POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF SO MANY OTHERS.

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR FUNDERS AND PARTNERS, TO ALL THE THIRD SECTOR AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS THAT WE WORK WITH, AND TO ALL THE COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO SHARED THEIR TIME, KNOWLEDGE AND GOOD IDEAS.



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