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**To:** Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee

**On:** 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023

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**Report by:** Chief Executive

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**Heading:** Evaluation of Winter Connections Programme

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1. At Leadership Board on 14 September 2022, elected members agreed that officers should develop a Winter Connections Programme which would provide a network of local places and spaces where people can connect to others in their community this winter.
- 1.2. In some local authority areas, plans were developed to open ‘warm banks’ – places where people can come to sit and keep warm during the winter period if they are having difficulty heating their homes. In Renfrewshire, the approach was focussed more on working alongside the local third sector to create opportunities for people to connect to each other and their communities over a range of activities. Winter Connections activities were designed to be always free, open to all, in every neighbourhood and guarantee a warm welcome.
- 1.3. £50,000 of grant funding was allocated by the Leadership Board in September 2022, to support local groups and organisations to participate in the programme and to contribute some of the costs of delivery where this was required. In response to the level of interest from community organisations, a further £20,000 was allocated to the Winter Connections programme with a further £10,000 allocated to OneRen to deliver a programme of Winter Connections activities across the library network.
- 1.4. An evaluation has now been carried out on the programme, and the key messages of the evaluation include:
  - Providing a specific activity at no cost and alongside provision of hot drinks or food has been key to the success of the Winter Connections programme. It was important for host organisations to have flexibility to adjust activities to ensure that they were as inclusive as possible.

- The social aspect of bringing people together created a sense of community, which was especially important for people who were feeling isolated. Activities provided opportunities to learn new skills, make new friends and be creative.
- Winter Connections highlighted the need for a programme of free activities and food for individuals and families that are experiencing financial hardship. The programme contributed to tackling food poverty in a discrete and dignified manner.
- Benefits of the programme included connecting people with each other, encouraging new people to engage with services and creating a sense of belonging to the local community. It also helped to reduce social isolation and reduce financial costs for individuals and families.
- The programme enabled some organisations to attract new volunteers and raise awareness of services throughout the local community.
- The success of the libraries' programme demonstrates that these community assets are well placed to deliver free activities for all ages and to link visitors with other services and sources of information and advice.

1.5. In addition to the key messages, the evaluation report also provides a series of recommendations to be considered as part of any future programme. A copy of the full evaluation is attached at Appendix 1.

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## **2. Recommendations**

2.1 It is recommended that members of the Fairer Renfrewshire Sub-Committee:

- Note the content of the report

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## **3. Background**

3.1 The development of the Winter Connections Programme has been a key focus for officers in December and January. As elected members will be aware £70,000 of funding was allocated from the Fairer Renfrewshire Programme to support the delivery of Winter Connections activities, with an additional £10,000 funding allocated to OneRen to deliver activities. A Winter Connections funding process was developed at pace, with approvals being made from October 2022.

3.2 The programme offers an extensive and varied programme of activities across Renfrewshire, hosted by community groups. These are largely running until March 2023. Hosts are asked to sign up to Winter Connections principles, and support has been provided to all host organisations including a Winter Connections toolkit, printed materials, information sharing, access to other services such as advice, period products provided for locations

- 3.3 Promotion of the programme and all linked activities has been a core focus, with a partnership Winter Connections identity developed. Information on Winter Connections is available on the Council website, which includes a searchable map function. Activities are widely promoted through social media, and printed materials have been widely distributed across all towns and villages across Renfrewshire.
- 3.4 The funding is now fully exhausted, and the programme has drawn to a close. A number of projects have secured alternative funding to continue their projects moving forward.
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## **Implications of the Report**

1. **Financial** – Funding to deliver the programme was allocated through the Fairer Renfrewshire programme.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – none
3. **Community/Council Planning** – the Partnerships and Inequalities team worked with a range of local community groups and organisations and with One Ren to deliver the programme. Officers from Engage Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire HSCP also fully supported the process, including the assessment of grant applications.
4. **Legal** - none
5. **Property/Assets** - none
6. **Information Technology** - none
7. **Equality and Human Rights** – The aim of the Winter Connections programme was to provide activities which were free at point of access, inclusive and accessible. Funding was allocated to support communities with particular requirements :- in terms of in relation to geographical location, but also in terms of different equality groups.
8. **Health and Safety** - none
9. **Procurement** – none
10. **Risk** – none
11. **Privacy Impact** – none
12. **COSLA Policy Position** – none
13. **Climate Risk** – none

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## An evaluation of the Winter Connections Programme

The only thing I would change is for the Winter Connections project not to come to an end. It has been a great project, bringing communities together during very difficult times.

Johnstone Castle Learning Centre

**Open to all**  
Warm welcome  
guaranteed

**Winter  
Connections**

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# 1. Executive Summary

As part of Renfrewshire Council's wider response to the cost-of-living crisis, between November 2022 and March 2023, £70,000 of funding was allocated from the Fairer Renfrewshire programme to support the delivery of a Winter Connections programme. The programme was delivered in partnership with local organisations and aimed to encourage people to connect and participate in activities in warm and welcoming spaces across communities in Renfrewshire.

Local community and voluntary organisations could apply for small grants of up to £2,000 to support with the additional costs of making venues, activities and sessions open as part of the programme. Items eligible for funding included equipment, food, energy costs, and rent.

## Key findings

- Providing a specific activity at no cost and alongside provision of hot drinks or food has been key to the success of the Winter Connections programme. It was important for host organisations to have flexibility to adjust activities to ensure that they were as inclusive as possible.
- The social aspect of bringing people together created a sense of community, which was especially important for people who were feeling isolated. Activities provided opportunities to learn new skills, make new friends and be creative.
- Winter Connections highlighted the need for a programme of free activities and food for individuals and families that are experiencing financial hardship. The programme contributed to tackling food poverty in a discrete and dignified manner.
- Benefits of the the programme included connecting people with each other, encouraging new people to engage with services and creating a sense of belonging to the local community. It also helped to reduce social isolation and reduce financial costs for individuals and families.
- The programme enabled some organisations to attract new volunteers and raise awareness of services throughout the local community.
- The success of the libraries' programme demonstrates that these community assets are well placed to deliver free activities for all ages and to link visitors with other services and sources of information and advice.

## 2. About Winter Connections

### Background

As part of Renfrewshire Council's wider response to the cost-of-living crisis, between November 2022 and March 2023, £70,000 of funding was allocated from the Fairer Renfrewshire programme to support the delivery of a Winter Connections programme. The programme was delivered in partnership with local organisations and aimed to encourage people to connect and participate in activities in warm and welcoming spaces across communities in Renfrewshire.

Local community and voluntary organisations could apply for small grants of up to £2,000 to support with the additional costs of making venues, activities and sessions open as part of the programme. Items eligible for funding included equipment, food, energy costs, and rent.

Funded activities needed to fit the criteria of Winter Connections and be:

- open, free and easy to access
- inclusive, welcoming, respectful, and safe
- able or willing to provide connections to other services and supports
- able to offer warm drinks/snacks/food along with activities, where possible

There were 49 applications to the programme which were assessed by officers from Renfrewshire Council, the Health and Social Care Partnership and Engage Renfrewshire.

Of the 49 applications, 38 were successful, 10 were unsuccessful and one application was withdrawn. Unsuccessful applications were signposted to alternative sources of funding where appropriate.

In addition to the Fairer Renfrewshire funding, a further £10,000 was allocated to One Ren to provide a programme of activities across Renfrewshire's libraries, focussing particularly on areas where there was no Winter Connections activity proposed. Activities included family craft sessions, board games and community jigsaw-building sessions, film shows and family play sessions.

To support host organisations in their delivery of activities, a toolkit of information and materials, including support and advice around how to offer inclusive and safe environments, and information on local help and support available for residents, was provided.



Winter Connections branded materials, including posters and stickers as well as leaflets with advice on where to find support with financial worries were also distributed to organisations participating in the programme along with free period products.

A dedicated Winter Connections webpage was set up on the Council's website with an interactive map displaying all venues, activities, and facilities.

To support individuals and families with financial issues, advice sessions provided by Advice Works were arranged at some of the Winter Connections venues. Drop-in sessions were also trialled, where an income advisor was present once a week in a different library.

### The Winter Connections programme

A wide range of activities were provided as part of the programme, some of which were tailored to the age of those attending. Some projects were targeted specifically at older people or younger people, but many aimed to be intergenerational and to attract families. Activities included:

- Creative activities, such as crochet classes, flower arranging, knitting, arts and crafts, and sewing workshops for young people
- Fun activities for all ages, such as bingo, board games, quizzes, Jam Jar movies, and a family friendly community woodland tour
- Educational activities, such as digital skills and cookery demonstrations
- Activities for younger children, such as Bookbug and lunch sessions
- Activities for teenagers, including a Youth Club with recreational sports, socialising, video games and a chill out venue
- Fitness Classes
- Coffee Mornings

All activities were delivered with hot drinks, home baking and often a bowl of soup, a hot breakfast, or sandwiches. The St Mirren FC Charitable Foundation project provided an evening meal alongside their activities.

Renfrewshire Libraries ran a 12-week programme of events and activities across Renfrewshire's 12 public libraries. The programme offered:

- family board games sessions
- community jigsaw activity
- tutor-led craft sessions
- self-led craft sessions
- play sessions
- film shows



Some venues provided phone and tablet charging facilities and Winter Warmer packs which included blankets, hot water bottles, large flasks to enable people to take hot drinks or soup home with them. The Star Project also provided slow cookers, where appropriate.

The Winter Connections programme also promoted the work of other organisations delivering warm food and/or activities during the winter months, for example, the Salvation Army, Street Stuff, Kairos, Linwood Gospel Hall, and Spateston Bowling Club.

A list of the funded host organisations delivering Winter Connections activities can be found in Appendix 1.

### **A partnership approach to Winter Connections**

Renfrewshire Council worked with Engage and the Health and Social Care Partnership to deliver the Winter Connections programme, ensuring a transparent cross-sector approach to the programme. Having knowledge of the groups and organisations funded by the Community Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund meant that partners were able to evaluate Winter Connections applications based on knowledge of other available support across localities. Partners were also able to link Winter Connections applications in with Section 10 and other grant funding where appropriate.

The straightforward application process ensured that funding could be allocated quickly and encouraged smaller organisations to apply. Engage was able to support groups who were struggling with applications, or with any organisational development issues and helped with promoting and publicising the activities across sectors. They also provided a link to useful resources tackling cost of living increases

<https://engagerenfrewshire.org/resources/renfrewshire-food-fuel-and-finance-resources.html>

## **3. Evaluating the Winter Connections programme**

In mid-March, a feedback form was sent out to every organisation hosting Winter Connections activity to ask about their experience of delivering activities and to gain understanding of the difference that it had made for those who participated.

Out of 38 funded projects, 21 feedback forms were returned. A further 8 projects submitted feedback via email. This information has been collated and forms the remainder of this report.

In addition, visits to 12 projects took place between January and March 2023 to meet project managers and find out how projects were getting on.

Feedback from organisations also included photographs of activities, some of which are also included in this report.

### Promoting Activities

Renfrewshire Council's Communications and Marketing team promoted the Winter Connections programme widely through social media. Statistics show that the content was seen on social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter by 142,627 people. The posts were engaged with on social media, where people liked, shared, retweeted, etc., a total of 12,159 times. Renfrewshire Council issued 3 media releases and published 6 Facebook posts, 4 tweets and 24 Facebook and Instagram Stories between October 2022 and March 2023. Case studies of 3 organisations on Facebook were also widely viewed. Total web views for the dedicated website were 6,839.

Organisations were asked how people found out about the activities they were offering. The majority, 75% of organisations, reported that people learned about the project through word of mouth, while 65% stated that social media was a key influence in people hearing about their Winter Connections activity.

| How did people find out about your Winter Connections project? |    |
|--|----|
| Method of information  | %  |
| Word of mouth  | 75 |
| Social media   | 65 |
| Posters  | 40 |
| Leaflets   | 20 |
| Referral from another organisation                             | 20 |
| Attending other activities                                     | 20 |
| Local newspaper  | 15 |

|                              |    |
|------------------------------|----|
| Church notice                | 10 |
| Partners                     | 10 |
| Council website              | 5  |
| Organisation's Facebook page | 5  |
| Engage newsletter            | 5  |
| Sandwich board outside venue | 5  |
| Database of contacts         | 5  |

Note: All respondents provided more than one answer to this question

Organisations often promoted their projects at existing sessions with individuals and families that they were already supporting, while some received referrals from the local housing association, local churches, or the Salvation Army. Remode distributed flyers to local schools, theatre groups, libraries, and youth associations. Inchinnan Development Trust started a promotional campaign in the weeks leading up to the start of the project, delivering physical leaflets to all households in the area and using their social media channels, website, and membership list to engage the wider communities and other local organisations.

### 3.1. How successful were the activity sessions?

The inclusive and welcoming environment offered by each of the Winter Connections projects made it easy for people to drop into venues, which provided a safe space to have something to eat and socialise. Respondents suggested that a key factor in attendance was the provision of a specific activity to participate in at no cost. Activities brought people together and provided an opportunity to talk to others experiencing similar challenges.

*To be able to offer activities at no cost. The activities brought people into the venue, but it was the chats and availability of information that kept them coming in.*

Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust

However, feedback also suggests that, although activities drew people in, people attended mainly because they enjoyed the social aspect of coming together with different people

and interacting, which was especially important for people who were feeling isolated. One project described it as allowing “a community to be formed in a warm safe setting”.

*It got people out of their houses during a time of the year when most people stay indoors due to the cold and miserable weather and provided activities for them locally and free of charge.*

*This resulted in people meeting existing friends and new people, increasing community cohesion, reduces isolation and boosts mental health.*

Friends of Howwood Park

A survey by the Warm Welcome campaign, a UK-wide network of over 4,200 warm spaces also found that the greatest impact of these spaces was “in providing a sense of community and tackling loneliness in a safe and welcoming space.” They estimate that around half a million people used these spaces during the winter.<sup>1</sup>

Organisations pointed to other factors of the Winter Connections programme that worked well, including the provision of food to take home and free period products.

Across the Winter Connections programme in libraries, the provision of tea and coffee was crucial to the success of the programme and was very much appreciated. Drinks were provided on a self-serve basis, but it is estimated that 4,000 drinks were consumed over the 12-week period.

Johnstone Castle Learning Centre’s Winter Connections project provided an opportunity for people to learn cooking skills and tackle food poverty and for children to bring out their creative side through arts and crafts activities.

*We received very positive feedback from all our service users, our adult class said it tackled the loneliness and isolation of staying at home, it allowed them a safe, warm, inviting place to meet and gave them the opportunity to meet new friends whilst learning new skills. Our youth said that the cooking was great, they really enjoyed making new dishes and trying out new recipes.*

Johnstone Castle Learning Centre

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<sup>1</sup> More than 500,000 people in UK visited ‘warm rooms’ during the winter, Patrick Butler, The Guardian, 26 April 2023

When asked if there was anything that they would change about their Winter Connections activity, six of the organisations stated that they would not change anything. Suggestions made by the remaining organisations included:

- Changing to a larger capacity venue to allow for more attendees and provide a larger space to deliver a wider range of indoor activities
- Consider running individual indoor and outdoor experiences to meet demand
- More advertising in schools and communities
- More opening times
- Later start time
- Change advertising to attract more families

A couple of projects made changes early on. When the café within their building suddenly closed just as they were starting their Winter Connections programme, Home-Start Renfrewshire and Inverclyde had to go further afield for food. And Roar modified their Well-Connected project to a more suitable time and to provide an activity that was identified locally as a need.

*Learning that a 9am session wasn't popular but recognising this early on allowed me to amend the session time and add in an activity that allowed the funding to be successful in creating a well-used warm space.*

*Roar – Well Connected*

Roar Connections for Life project also learned that a drop in can be challenging if most people who attend are older people with health issues which are not assessed in advance.

If they were to run a Winter Connections project again, Renfrewshire Rainbow Buddies would involve parents in helping with snacks, setting up activities and tidying up afterwards so that this is not solely the responsibility of volunteers.

The Star Project felt that they would have benefited from advertising their entire Winter Connections programme online so that people were aware of everything that was being delivered. However, the flexibility of the Winter Connections programme meant that they were quickly able to adapt their activities to be more inclusive.

### 3.2. How many people attended?

Organisations were asked about the number of people who attended their activities. We did not ask organisations to keep track of numbers while delivering activities, but some did, and others provided an estimate.



Coffee morning, Howwood

The average number of people attending each session was around 19. Sessions which attracted the most people were coffee mornings, bingo, Jam Jar movies, evening activities, activities for toddlers or young people and digital sessions. Howwood

Community Council's coffee mornings drew up to fifty people at each session and Erskine Arts' peak attendance was 53 people for one of their Friday Piece n' Music food and music club sessions.

Not all organisations were able to provide a total figure of how many different people participated in activities during the programme period. At the time of submitting the feedback forms one project was still running for another four weeks so was unable to provide a total. From the twenty responses received, it is estimated that 1,834 people benefited from the Winter Connections programme.



Erskine Arts, Piece n Music club

Organisations were delighted to see that activities engaged people who would not normally participate in activities or use services and who are continuing to engage with them.

*62% of individuals who accessed the Drop-In for the first-time during Winter Connections, have continued engaging with STAR across a number of different activities from Gardening Clubs to well-being workshops.*

*The Star Project*



*Houston classes has started with a successful 14 new Children joining us on Monday so 27 in total between parent/ carers and children and we're inundated with messages of people who couldn't make it due to school holidays so we're hoping to welcome even more next week.*

*Renfrewshire Rainbow Buddies*

While most activities attracted a mix of participants, who attended often depended on the type of activity offered. For example, bingo was more likely to attract a mix of older people and families, while fitness classes and activities such as crochet or flower arranging attracted women.

Of the 21 projects who provided feedback, 13 stated that it was mainly older people who attended activities, while 8 appealed to children. An equal number of projects appealed to men, women, families, young people, or teenagers. Three of the projects drew in people from ethnically diverse communities and people from across Renfrewshire, not just their local area.

*We saw several Ukrainian families/individuals access STAR for the first time. Initially, these individuals held back from the rest of the community members preferring, instead, to speak with one another. However, as the weeks passed, we noted that they began to engage with the regular community members more, particularly during our game evenings.*

*The Star Project*

Most libraries offered two timetabled sessions each week of board games sessions and community jigsaws, however in some libraries these were available on a drop-in basis. The games were particularly popular with children and families. It is estimated that almost 2,000 people engaged with the timetabled sessions for games, jigsaws, and crafts over the 12 weeks.

Five of the libraries gave out craft kit bags for self-led craft sessions that people could do individually, with staff, with friends and family, or take home to use later. Foxbar Library offered an 11-week series of creative workshops led by an experienced artist and workshop facilitator. Regular attendees have been offered the opportunity to continue to meet in the library to work on creative projects together. All of those who participated expressed enhanced feelings of wellbeing from the enjoyment of the activities, the warm and welcoming library environment, and the provision of hot drinks.





Libraries board game table



Libraries craft table

*I really enjoy these classes as it gets me out of the house and have a social life. I get to meet new people and do crafty stuff. It's very therapeutic. Thank you.*

*Library visitor*

Obtaining a license for screening films was more difficult than anticipated and resulted in a delay in screening, however 24 people attended the first film screening at Ferguslie Library. The library will continue to screen free family movies on Tuesday evenings and Saturday mornings.

Drop-in play sessions were delivered in four libraries around the themes of messy play, sensory play, and construction play. The sessions were attended by almost 400 babies, children, and grown-ups. The 12 sessions were hugely popular with families, with feedback suggesting that the sessions reduced the isolation of caring for small children and enabled parents to meet others in the local community. Parents also commented on the developmental benefits of the experience for the children and the prohibitive cost of similar experiences elsewhere.



Libraries messy play session

| Who attended your Winter Connections project? |                    |    |
|---|--------------------|----|
|   | Number of projects | %  |
| Older People                                  | 13                 | 62 |
| Children                                      | 8                  | 38 |
| Men   | 6                  | 29 |
| Women   | 6                  | 29 |
| Young people / teenagers                      | 5                  | 24 |
| Families                                      | 5                  | 24 |
| People from ethnically diverse communities    | 3                  | 14 |

### 3.3. What did organisations learn?

Organisations were asked if, through delivering Winter Connections activity, they had learned anything about what their community wants or needs.

The main learning point was around the clear need for a programme of free activities and food, particularly highlighting a need for food provision for individuals and families that are experiencing real financial hardship.

*Before coming along, I didn't usually eat in the morning, so it's been a real benefit to me.  
It saves me a lot of money on tea, coffee, sugar, milk, bread and butter.  
Attendee at the Tannahill Centre*

Projects identified a need for more activities for older people and a demand for older adults to feel more confident using mobile devices, tablets, and laptops.

The lack of free activities for children who are not attending nursery, particularly during winter months, was also highlighted. A need for a creative outlet for young people and the lack of accessible opportunities available for this was noted by one of the projects.

One project reflected on the need to consider how to engage with people who do not have the confidence to participate in activities and who struggle to connect even when opportunities are offered to them.

The way in which support is provided is also important. People prefer support to be delivered in a discrete way as one project showed by offering food items via winning at Bingo or allowing people to help themselves to items rather than being given them.

*Games night enabled the community to have fun, and bond with their families and each other whilst also giving them access to practical gifts such as food hampers, clothes vouchers etc.*

*The Star Project*

Another project learned that providing activities or events in their local village encourages people to attend, making it important to maintain community and village halls to a good standard to provide a pleasant community hub for everyone to access.

*We learned that our community really thrives when brought together and given the opportunity to connect with their local spaces and one another, with this helping to foster a greater sense of belonging and connectivity within the community. Our community greatly benefits from a community hub/communal space that has no expectation of spend, is accessible/welcoming to all and in a truly neutral setting (e.g., non-religious, open to all generations/families), allowing all demographics to feel able and welcome to participate.*

*Inchinnan Development Trust*

Projects also highlighted that, due to the cost-of-living crisis, people are becoming more reliant on low cost or free activities to stay healthy and that communities are seeking opportunities to connect and be active.

The Star Project recognised that the subsidised food provision that they offer through their Pantry Plus was limited to individuals only being able to access it during the day. The Winter Connections funding enabled them to extend the hours of the Pantry Plus to run into the evening alongside their drop-in activities, so that individuals who had previously been unable to access the service could benefit from it

Dedicated advice service drop ins were trialled in a different library locations throughout the programme, however these were not well attended. However, providing this advice alongside the community market at the Tannahill Centre was more successful.

*The additional support from Advice Works has also become a much-valued source with Chris becoming a regular friendly face that local people have been able to depend upon.*

The Tannahill Centre

### **3.4. What difference did the Winter Connections Programme make?**

This section looks at the difference the Winter Connections programme made for the people that took part in activities.

Organisations were asked whether they thought that the activities they had delivered as part of the programme had provided any benefits for those attending. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive with organisations highlighting several impacts from the programme. Only one respondent was not sure about the impact of the programme.

All of those who completed feedback forms agreed that the programme activities had benefited attendees by connecting them to each other, while 90% of organisations thought that activities had encouraged new people to engage with the organisation and created a sense of belonging to the local community. Other perceived benefits were reducing social isolation (85% of respondents), reducing financial costs (70%), providing access to information and advice, and providing fun activities (65% each).

| Benefit to people attending activities                              | Number of responses | %   |
|---|---------------------|-----|
| Connecting people to each other                                     | 21                  | 100 |
| Encouraging new people to engage with the project/organisation      | 19                  | 90  |
| Creating a sense of belonging to the local community/neighbourhood? | 19                  | 90  |
| Reducing social isolation   | 18                  | 85  |
| Reducing financial costs  | 15                  | 70  |
| Providing fun activities  | 14                  | 66  |

|   |    |    |
|---|----|----|
| Providing access to information/advice                          | 13 | 65 |
| Providing the opportunity to learn something new                | 12 | 60 |
| Helping people to learn about a new service in their local area | 9  | 45 |
| Providing entertainment for children                            | 7  | 35 |

*Winter Connections has had a very positive impact on participants wellbeing, people have been brought together in a safe, warm, welcoming, and engaging environment to talk openly about themselves, their lives, challenges etc to have fun and do interesting things and to eat some warm delicious and nutritious food, thus experiencing all of the benefits selected above.*

*St Mirren FC Charitable Foundation*

Activities helped to reduce social isolation, giving people something to look forward to and providing enjoyment and company, particularly for older people and in more rural areas.

Organisations described an often-unanticipated benefit for some of those participating in activities: attendees who returned each week had built up friendships. Attendees often commented on their enjoyment of the social aspect of activities and one project reported that individuals who attended the project have now become a group of friends and these men share information on other activities that are happening in the area. Friendships also formed within volunteer teams.

*We have taken part in a couple of other projects Winter buddies at St Mirren and Glencairn Court a blether and a cup of soup. Our tenants have loved this and made new friends for life.*

*Forever Young*

*These [Winter Connections] have been great wee things. You get really good soup, a good chat and you go up the road feeling like you were part of something.*

*Attendee at the Star Project*

Organisations were able to offer essential nutritious food to people who were in need. The programme helped to reduce financial costs by providing snacks and meals and, in some



cases, providing food to take home, often through links with local community pantries. All the organisations involved in Winter Connections also provided free period products.

*Many adults who attend our groups were not eating breakfast or lunch before attending. The programme ensured they did have hot food while they were with us, this encouraged some of the families to come along at times when they might otherwise have not ventured out in the winter.*

*Home-Start Renfrewshire and Inverclyde*

*I use it every day, it's really handy and I also access the community market. I use it to get a heat/ see pals. I save money, meet people, I'm not isolated any more. It's like being in a café without having to spend money.*

*Attendee at the Tannahill Centre*

Organisations also commented on the fact that activities had enabled them to engage with people they would not otherwise have reached and provided a safe space for existing members to engage more with the organisation.

*The services delivered because of the Winter Connections Fund has brought us into contact with a wide range of vulnerable individuals who otherwise would not have visited or attended the Tannahill Centre.*

*The Tannahill Centre*

Renfrewshire Rainbow Buddies were also able to welcome new people to their service, including grandparents, foster parents and childminders. Erskine Arts have liaised with the Mears Group to invite asylum seekers along to their Friday Soup Sessions to welcome them into the community.

Attendees also benefited from being able to connect with other organisations. Inchinnan Development Trust invited Shopmobility Paisley & District along to their events, helping to increase awareness of the mobility support service.

Projects helped to create a sense of belonging to the local community by providing activities in local spaces and community hubs.

*Events gave community members a chance to be introduced and/or become familiarised with a local communal space and the benefits it can provide. The wide range of demographics we were able to engage with these events helped to facilitate new*

*connections between community members including new intergenerational connections - helping to boost community cohesion.*

*Inchinnan Development Trust (IDT)*

*I met new people and have been in the company of people I wouldn't normally be in. I don't eat much anyways but being able to sit and chat with everyone as a community has benefited my health.*

*Attendee at the Tannahill Centre*

For young people participating in activities the programme had several benefits. Activities were provided in safe spaces offering the opportunity to learn something new, have fun and make friends.

For older people, the programme also offered opportunities to learn new skills.

*It has brought more people together as some participants were able to help others download books, apps for buses, write email to each other. It allowed everyone that it's a normal feel not to know what your device does and not to be scared of it.*

*ROAR – Well Connected*

### **Comments from attendees at library activities**

I am part of the knitting group in Renfrew and I am so pleased that I have joined as I suffer bad from anxiety and feel this group helps me enormously to socialise.

So incredibly grateful for the hot chocolate and craft table for myself and the girls. Highlight of my week. Enjoy the company.

Yes, it helps for my well being as I don't get out much and it's the best 2 hours of my week as I get to meet people and learn new ideas.

All of the activities were fantastic and so inspirational. I've carried on with them at home. Also gave me a reason to get up & out and meeting people.

My son loved the club and building with the other children, it helped his confidence and hope it continues. Tea and coffee most welcome.

We would highly recommend this for families in the community to meet new people and have some fun in the process! We will definitely be back.



### 3.5. What did host organisations think about the Winter Connections programme?

This section considers what organisations thought about the programme, what worked well, what could be improved, and how hosts were supported. All responses to this question were overwhelmingly positive. Comments were related to three main areas – the application and funding process, delivering activities and the impact of the activities on those attending.

#### Application and funding process

Organisations reported that the application process for Winter Connections funding was straightforward, and they appreciated how quickly applications were processed and funding was awarded to them. Effective communication between council staff and successful applicants resulted in projects being set up and delivering activities quickly.

Organisations were satisfied with the guidance provided and appreciated the scope to amend projects but felt that information about the funding could have been provided at an earlier stage.

The marketing materials were considered extremely helpful.

*We loved the A5 reference leaflet provided. It was a good source when the conversation turned to signposting. In fact, one of our participants had trouble with her boiler, and we used the information on the sheet to refer her to Home Energy Scotland.*

*Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust*

In terms of promoting the Winter Connections programme, some organisations found it difficult to engage with people and suggested that some support in advertising activities through relevant networks would have been helpful. Future support in letting other groups know what is being offered in various locations would also be helpful.

One organisation suggested that groups could design their own literature and the Council could support with printing costs.

#### Delivering activities

Part of the success of the programme was the delivery by local community groups who knew what would work well in their area. The programme was also successful because it provided a wide variety of activities across a large geographical spread, and it provided an inclusive space for people from diverse backgrounds to get together and have fun.

Organisations had flexibility to enable them to tailor the activities to local need, and this helped to ensure that activities were well received and well attended.

Feedback suggests that the programme provided a social space for people who felt isolated and enabled people to make connections and build relationships. It was easy for projects to offer simple catering, and this made a significant difference in attracting participants.

Organisations were overwhelmingly positive about the support provided to them by Renfrewshire Council, describing staff as extremely helpful, prompt in responding to queries and always on hand to provide guidance. Comments about the information and resources provided were also very positive.

*The support and advice we received from Renfrewshire Council was excellent at every stage of the process, great communication.*

*St Mirren FC Charitable Foundation*

*The Zoom meeting that was held was a useful opportunity to understand the wider impact of the fund and hear how other people were handling it. This we found helpful to feel secure that we were on track with our aims in delivering the workshops. This also allowed us to think about what we were perhaps lacking and build that into our approach. As stated in a previous answer, a little more support in reaching wider community members could have been helpful.*

*Remode*

The support has also helped organisations to connect with other opportunities, with several organisations mentioning that they now offer free period products.

When asked if there was anything that Renfrewshire Council could improve on if running a similar programme in the future, there were suggestions from 16 of the 21 organisations. The most common suggestion was for more funding to run larger groups, to run projects for longer or to cover additional staffing costs. With more funding, more opportunities could be offered to existing service users and to engage with new members of the community.

*I think the programmes need to run long term, we now have groups of people who have made bonds, need support and enjoy attending, to stop these sessions now would be counterproductive, we are planning on securing funding so we can continue to deliver a programme similar to this.*

*St Mirren FC Charitable Foundation*

## Impact of Winter Connections

Organisations participating in Winter Connections agreed that the activities were needed and appreciated by participants, and many would like to see the programme run every year, start earlier in the year, or even run as a year-round initiative.

Those running activities enjoyed seeing the impact on community members and projects working with young people and children said that they really enjoyed themselves.

*I really hope this happens again next year. And the year after! I think it has been fabulous to be able to provide local things for people in the village during a time of the year, which is the most dismal, and has been a bit of a lifeline, particularly for the older residents. On behalf of the village, we want to say thank you for providing us with the funding to allow us to do this.*

*Friends of Howwood Park*

The involvement of volunteers was key to ensuring that projects worked well. One project mentioned its digital volunteers who were able to teach people about their devices and answer questions about digital challenges. A couple of projects also found that the programme helped to attract some new volunteers, including Renfrewshire Access Panel which attracted 8 new volunteers through the Winter Connections programme.

*Winter Connections enabled us to stay open later, which meant we could offer two young volunteers working towards their Duke of Edinburgh Award space to fulfil their prerequisite hours with us. Their experience had such a profound effect on them, that they have requested volunteering jobs with STAR throughout the Summer.*

*The Star Project*

The location and timing of activities also had an impact. For St Mirren FC Charitable Foundation, having sessions at night in the stadium and in the fans' area encouraged people to come along and created an engaging and relaxing environment for participants. By being able to open their gym on a Saturday evening, Twist and Hit Cheerleaders could provide a safe place for children to go, providing peace of mind for parents too.

*The programme provided spaces and events on which community members could rely, helping to provide a sense of stability, a space for recreation and socialisation (without expectation of spend) and a warm meal/drink in uncertain times (i.e., in the post-COVID, cost of living crisis period).*

*Inchinnan Development Trust*

The clear impact of the programme has led a few of the organisations to try to secure funding to continue their activities beyond 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. One organisation, KLAS Care, has secured funding from Corra foundation and Aldi to continue supporting families with the cost of living until the end of June. The programme was seen as a useful addition to existing services and participants felt much better for participating.

The Star Project staff recognised that that the evening Drop-In and late-night Pantry Plus opening hours were having a significant beneficial impact on the wellbeing of the community. Although they were unable to continue to fund the project, they did not want to lose the good work and relationships that had been built up during the winter months.

*Therefore, our Pantry Plus continues to be open later on Tuesdays, our groups are available later on Tuesdays and staff have committed to having a games night for the community at least once every couple of months. We see this as an opportunity for new people coming into the area to have the chance to meet other people as well as offering a solution to vulnerable adults experiencing social isolation, particularly in the evening.*

*The Star Project*

The Tannahill Centre worked with Ferguslie Park Housing Association to secure an additional £20,000 to provide practical support to local people, many of whom would not have accessed the support if they had not been involved in the Winter Connections Programme. The Centre has also received funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to extend their Winter Connections activity to become a year-round initiative and they are reviewing how they can support people to become more involved in the activities taking place elsewhere, within the Tannahill Centre and across the community.

Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust is also hoping that their Wednesday Crafternoon session may be continued, and St Mirren FC Charitable Foundation are also seeking funding to continue providing a programme.

*Overall, I think the programme went well. It brought communities together; it gave them an opportunity to meet new people and build relationships in a warm and safe environment*

*whilst learning new skills. It tackled loneliness and isolation, food poverty, high fuel costs. It has also had a positive effect on people's mental and physical wellbeing. It helped reduce the possibility of the young people engaging in antisocial behaviour and youth disorder.*

*Tackled, Isolation and loneliness.*

*Johnstone Castle Learning Centre*

## **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Winter Connections programme aimed to encourage people to connect and participate in activities in warm and welcoming spaces across communities in Renfrewshire. Feedback suggests that the programme benefited attendees by connecting them to each other and creating a sense of belonging to their local community. There is evidence that the programme encouraged new people to engage with services, helping to reduce social isolation, reduce financial costs, provide access to information and advice, and provide free fun activities for all age groups.

Whilst the programme has been a great success, there are some recommendations to be considered if a similar programme is to be delivered in future.

### **Recommendation 1 – Design of the programme**

The first awards for the Winter Connections programme were distributed in November but some projects did not start until January 2023. To ensure that a similar programme can begin to deliver activities from November a longer lead in time is advised, with funding allocated by the end of September.

It is also recommended that projects run from 1<sup>st</sup> October to 31<sup>st</sup> March to cover the coldest months of the year.

Encouraging more organisations to deliver evening activities will ensure that residents who work during the day can also benefit from the programme.

### **Recommendation 2 - Promotion of the programme**

A few host organisations found it difficult to engage with people and would have benefited from some support in advertising their activities. Keeping funded organisations up to date with any new activity that they can share through their networks will ensure that everyone is aware of what is being offered in other locations and facilitate signposting between organisations and activities.

Only a few organisations were able to attract individuals from ethnically diverse communities. For a similar programme, working more closely with the equality groups in Renfrewshire will raise awareness of the inclusivity of activities and support host organisations to put in place relevant support to ensure that people can fully benefit from the programme.

### **Recommendation 3 – Provision of advice and information**

The demand for information and advice around financial support has increased significantly during the cost-of-living crisis. The pilot Advice Works drop in sessions in libraries were not successful and consultation with organisations about how this support and advice could be provided in future would be helpful.

Providing host organisations with information on the different roles of Citizens Advice, Social Security Scotland and Advice Works will increase awareness of the range of financial support that exists and enable them to refer individuals to the relevant resources and advice.

## 5. Appendix 1 – Organisations hosting Winter Connections

Organisations which hosted Winter Connections activity

|   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Active Communities                      | Paisley Methodist Central Halls      |
| Brick Lane Music Academy                | Paisley St George's Outreach Centre  |
| Erskine Arts                            | RAMH (Recovery Across Mental Health) |
| Forever Young                           | Rays of Hope                         |
| Friends of Howwood Park                 | Renfrew Trinity Church of Scotland   |
| Home-Start Renfrewshire & Inverclyde    | Renfrew YMCA                         |
| Howwood Community Council               | Renfrewshire Access Panel            |
| Inchinnan Development Trust             | Renfrewshire Rainbow Buddies         |
| Johnstone Castle Learning Centre        | Renfrewshire Remode                  |
| Kickin' On                              | ROAR – Connections for Life Ltd      |
| Kilbarchan Improvement Project          | ROAR – Well Connected                |
| KLAS Care CIC                           | Shopmobility Paisley & District      |
| Langbank Village Centre                 | St Mark's (Oldhall) Church           |
| Linwood Community Council               | St Mirren FC Charitable Foundation   |
| Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust | The Star Project                     |
| New Tannahill Centre Ltd                | Thorn Athletic Community Trust       |
| Our Place Our Families                  | Twist and Hit Cheerleaders           |
|   | West End Community Centre            |



## 6. Appendix 2 – Case Studies

### Case Study: Remode – Stitching for Change

Remode ran sewing craft workshops for young people aged 8-16 years old focussing on textile, collage, and printing. The project delivered practical, hands on and fun activities, bringing together young people from Gallowhill area to learn new skills in a social and enjoyable environment.

Children and young people created work inspired by climate change and learned basic techniques in hand-stitching (embroidery stitches, button sewing, etc) to make a small stuffed decoration. Young people were also taught the basics in machine sewing and how to create a bag from start to finish using upcycled fabrics.

As well as having fun and being excited to try new activities, young people learned about global and environmental issues. The workshops enabled them to express their views in a creative way.

*“A lot of our young people expressed satisfaction with themselves and were excited to relate this to their parents and guardians (we received positive feedback on this). They often enjoyed the workshops as a social space as well, and the opportunity for something that's not usually in their immediate community.”*

It was challenging to attract young people aged 16 and over involved in the workshops, however those who did participate expressed positive experiences of the workshops. For a future programme, more promotion about the project through the Council and other networks would help in engaging more young people.

*“Having a space where young people could come that didn't feel like school seemed impactful. We often had pizza or other food for them on offer, creating a chilled environment where they could feel relaxed and social. Also, presenting them with creative activities where they could freely express their thoughts and ideas often gave them a large sense of pride and accomplishment when we finished the project and reflected on everything that had been made.”*

## Case study: Paisley Methodist Central Halls Saturday Get Together

Paisley Methodist Central Halls applied for funding for food and drink, craft materials and a contribution to energy costs to run a Saturday Get Together which aimed to provide a warm and welcoming environment for people from all age groups to connect. To counter the long, cold weekends over winter they proposed to open Central Halls on a Saturday and provide a soup and bread lunch, with hot drinks available throughout the afternoon.

The Halls has a suite of rooms which provided space for different activities depending on the age profile of the people attending. Areas could be sectioned off for tea, games, craft activities and music. There were also smaller rooms where people could sit and chat or watch a movie. The organisers also provided connections to other services and supports.

The organisation has a track record of welcoming people at Central Hall and currently run a Men's Zone on a Wednesday afternoon and the Men's Zone musicians would play for an hour every Saturday to entertain everyone. <https://fb.watch/jcsF7eNsCo/>

The Saturday Get Together opened on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2023. The project was advertised in the local newspaper and on the What's On in Renfrewshire website, but most people were drawn in by staff and volunteers standing at the door and inviting people to come in and join them.

On the first day around 25 people came through the door, including one person who asked to volunteer every Saturday.

"We had two lots of soup and bread, hot or cold drink and a biscuit all of which went down well. We had four of our existing Men's Zone folk come in for the afternoon. The Church has the Community Payback painters in now and they joined us at lunch time."

The Halls also had a connection with the Foodbank which provided surplus items that were available to anyone to take home. They also set up a warm clothes rail with good quality donations from Church members.

By the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 2023 the project was serving 50 bowls of soup.

"Three of the chaps come to our Wednesday Men's Zone, the other two came in for soup and had such a good time have been back every week since. Our numbers have been pretty steady in the 30's up to early 40's which we've been pleased about, three soup kettles on the go. We have a lot of regulars mainly single men, a few couples, and a smaller number of single ladies."

### Case Study: St Mirren FC Charitable Foundation – Winter Buddies

St Mirren FC Charitable Foundation delivered their Winter Buddies programme every Monday and Wednesday evening from January until March 2023 at the stadium between 6-8pm.

The programme was open to anyone who wanted to connect, get a hot meal, and have fun in a safe and warm environment. The varied schedule of activities ranged from arts & crafts, to games, live music and dancing, Buddie Bingo, quizzes, and indoor curling.


Winter Buddies provided a hot meal in the evening and reached many attendees who had participated in other Winter Connections activities during the day. Meals included mince and tatties, fish and chips, beef casserole and the very popular hot pot.

The organisation also invited along guests from partner organisations, such as Advice Works, Renfrewshire CAB, the Star Project and RAMH to provide support and services.

Hosting the programme at the stadium helped to engage people and ensure that the project was a success.

Approximately 25-30 people attended every evening, mainly older men and women and men referred by the Salvation Army.

Feedback from the organisation indicates that participants experienced a range of benefits from attending the programme and were keen for it to continue.



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