WICCI

WESTERN ISLES CANCER CARE INITIATIVE



ANNUAL REPORT 2025





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TABLE OF CONTENTS

2025 UPDATE FROM WICCI 3
KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 4
WICCI SOCIAL FUND 6
SOCIAL FUND BREAKDOWN 7
IMPROVING THE CANCER JOURNEY (ICJ) 8
WICCI COUNSELLING SUPPORT 10
ROYAL INVITATION 11
SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT 12
MACMILLAN NATIONAL CONFERENCE 13
A FOND FAREWELL 14
EVENTS AND OUTREACH 15
PARTNERSHIP WORKING 16
WHAT OUR CLIENTS SAY 17
THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 18

2025 UPDATE FROM WICCI

2025 was another busy and successful year for WICCI, with many significant achievements and opportunities to highlight the experiences of people affected by cancer in the Western Isles.

The Improving the Cancer Journey (ICJ) service was successfully launched in January 2025 in the Western Isles, providing valuable support to people living with and beyond cancer.

We were honoured to be invited by Their Majesties the King and Queen to a reception at Buckingham Palace, celebrating community-based cancer care. We were also one of the five charities asked to present what we do with a stand at the event which was huge recognition of the work being done by WICCI to support people in the Western Isles.

We were also invited to speak at the Scottish Parliament about the challenges faced by people receiving cancer treatment and support in rural and island communities. We also had the opportunity to present information about WICCI's work at the Macmillan National Conference in Glasgow.

Alongside these important events, we have continued to focus on our core priorities: providing practical and emotional support, grants, counselling, complementary therapies, wig fittings, support groups, craft groups and access to information and support.

It has been a very busy year, but one that has allowed WICCI to raise awareness of the unique challenges faced by our island community while continuing to provide much-needed support to those affected by cancer throughout the Western Isles.

In our staffing we had one change with Aoife Macrae who was one of our Improving the Cancer Journey Link Workers moving back to a clinical role as a Therapeutic Radiographer at Raigmore Hospital. We lost her as a member of staff but she made the decision she didn't want to leave WICCI completely and has come on board as a Trustee for the charity which we are all delighted about.

We also welcomed Katie Macneil as a new trustee, Katie started the Macmillan Fundraising Committee in Barra over 30 years ago, and created the amazing Barrathon. Katie brings a wealth of community experience and knowledge on to the board and we are delighted to have her support.

We welcomed Marina Macrae into the ICJ Link Worker role in November 2025 and she's quickly become an indespensible part of the team.

We also said a fond farewell to our long time chair who stepped down in September 2025 - Donald Macleod who was instrumental in setting WICCI up and making it what it is today. Thank you Donald for all you have done changing the face of non-clinical cancer care in the Western Isles.

WICCI Team Structure & Reporting Lines



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Social Fund

98 Applications received for WICCI Social Fund

£41,950 distributed

Complementary Therapies

572 Complementary therapies given





£31,355 spent

paid for by donations



Counselling

Two dedicated WICCI Counsellors providing face to face support across the Western Isles *

48 people supported

265 Therapy sessions





*Part Funded from Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund supported by Scottish Government and delivered by Third Sector Hebrides

Improving the Cancer Journey

56 Referrals



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Care Boxes

33 boxes delivered

Personalised and thoughtful gift boxes prepared individually for each recipient.



Wig Fitting Advice & Support

Relaxed and private wig fitting appointments with specially trained local hairdressers

27 Wig Fitting appointments





Support Groups

Stoma Support Group Meeting monthly at the WICCI Centre, around 13 members

Hebridean Harmony Singing for pleasure group, meets weekly online, at the WICCI Centre & once a month at Bethesda Hospice and Care Home

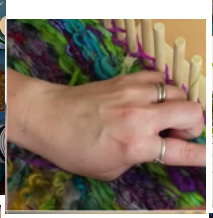
Ladies Cancer Support Groups Recently established groups meeting across the Western Isles giving a chance for a relaxed cuppa and chat.

Art and Craft Groups

A chance to relax, learn a new skill and meet new people

Monthly groups,













WICCI SOCIAL FUND- 2025

To make sure we were able to support those most in need we made some changes to the way the social fund is administered in order to prioritise those most in need and make it sustatinable, a criteria was set that funding would be available to those with under £16,000 in savings. We again saw an increase in second applications for people who were facing real ongoing financial hardship as a result of their cancer diagnosis. We also supported 8 applicants who were in households with young children. The most common request for support was for help with extra costs for travelling for treatment followed by applications relating to fuel poverty.

98

Applications received for WICCI Social Fund

£41,950 distributed

We continue to receive most applications through referrals from Kay Mackinnon, Macmillan Benefits Advisor 92%, with 6% from Macmillan Nurses, Therapists 1% and self referrals at 1%. We also continued to work closely with the Hebridean Men's Cancer Support Group to support some applicants with further funding.





1155

Applications supported since Fund opened

£549,947 distributed

Since the fund opened in February 2017 we have distributed £549,947 to 1155 individuals across the Western Isles. We are hugely thankful to Macmillan Cancer Support for their continued commitment supporting this venture.

142

Electric Blankets

in 2025 we distributed electric blankets which deliver consistent, soothing heat directly to the person, particularly beneficial for people experiencing cold sensitivity, fatigue, or chills due to cancer treatments. It also helps with reducing heating bills by heating the person instead of heating the entire home.

**Part funded by the Stornoway Trust Small Grants Community Fund*

12

Ton Bags of Logs

We nominated 12 families in fuel poverty to receive a delivery of kiln dried logs. This was helpful for people with open fires or wood burning stoves to heat the room they spend most time in during the day and reduce full home heating costs.

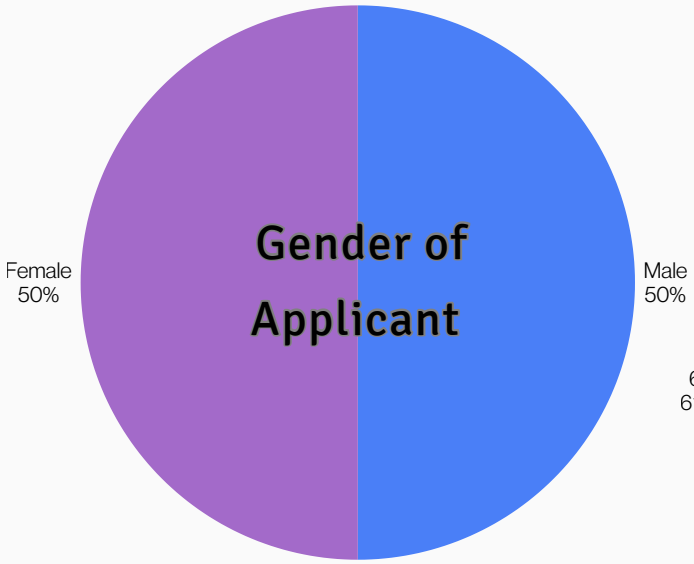
**Donated by a charity initiative set up by UCF, a local company based in Lewis.*

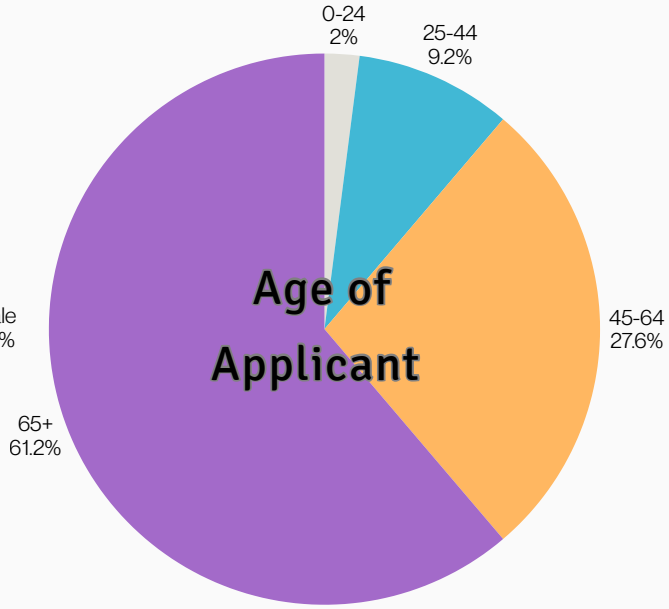
"We can't thank you enough for the grant to help with our heating and the electric heated blanket, since my husband became upwell and is at home all the time our heating bills have almost doubled."

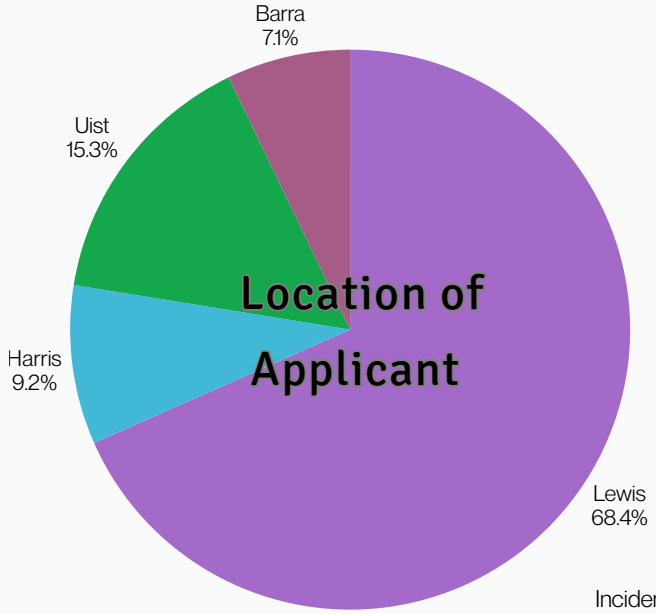
"This grant will make a massive difference to our family, we never expected to be going through this and are so grateful for all the help and support you have given us."

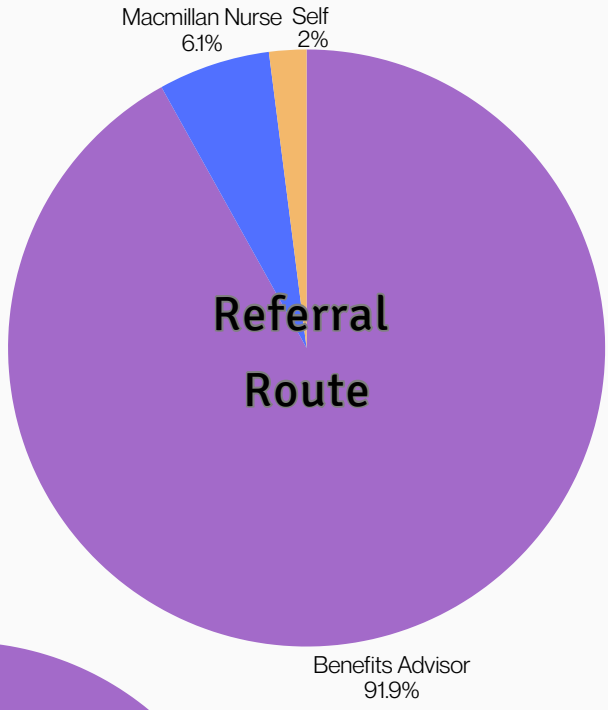
"UNTIL WE RECEIVED THE GRANT WE DIDN'T THINK WE WOULD BE ABLE TO AFFORD ANYWHERE TO STAY IN INVERNESS AS THE HOTEL COSTS ARE SO HIGH, NOT GOING WASN'T AN OPTION, BUT I HONESTLY THOUGHT I WOULD BE OUTSIDE THE HOSPITAL ON A BENCH"

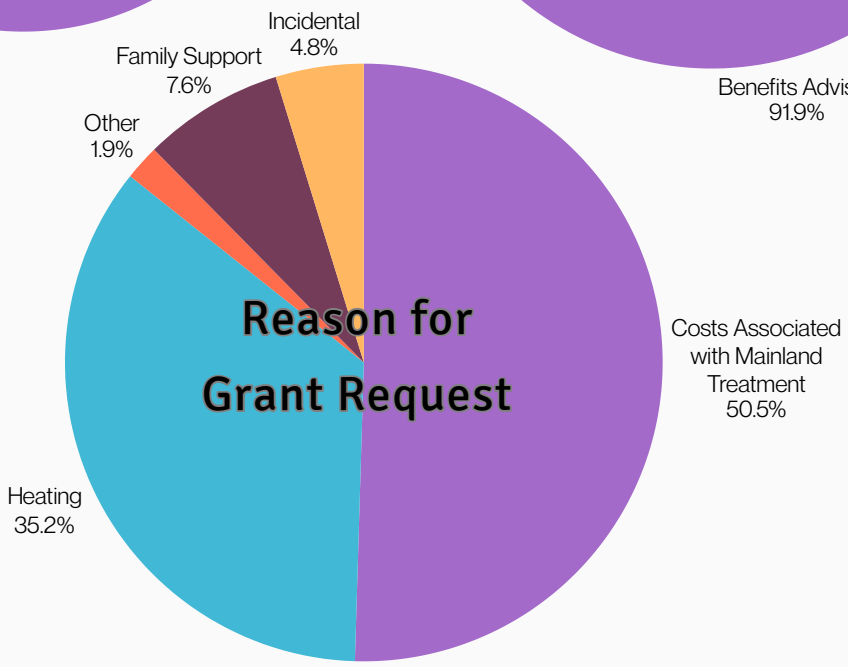
SOCIAL FUND BREAKDOWN











8 IMPROVING THE CANCER JOURNEY

In January 2025 we were delighted to launch the Improving the Cancer Journey service for the Western Isles



Sandra Mackinnon
ICJ Link Worker for Uist and Barra



Marina Macrae
ICJ Link Worker for Lewis and Harris

The Improving the Cancer Journey (ICJ) programme provides personalised, holistic support to people affected by cancer. It recognises that cancer can impact many areas of life beyond medical treatment, including emotional wellbeing, finances, employment, housing, relationships and social connections.

ICJ helps people identify their practical, emotional and social needs and connects them with appropriate services and support. This person-centred approach ensures support is tailored to individual circumstances and priorities.

Support can include:

- Emotional and mental wellbeing
- Financial, benefits and employment advice
- Housing, family and relationship support
- Cancer information and access to services
- Community and voluntary sector support
- Healthy living and self-management
- Social isolation and bereavement support

By identifying concerns early, ICJ can improve wellbeing, confidence and people's ability to manage the wider challenges of living with cancer.

Partnership Approach
ICJ brings together health, social care, local authorities and voluntary and community organisations, helping people access the right support without having to navigate complex services alone.
By complementing clinical treatment with practical, emotional and social support, ICJ contributes to a more joined-up approach to cancer care.

ICJ supports people as individuals, not simply as patients, helping promote better wellbeing, greater independence and a better cancer journey.

IMPROVING THE CANCER JOURNEY

'When I don't know something I have somewhere to ask. I could phone up anytime and say how do I deal with this concern? So, there's always there's a place to go. To have this support is great.'
- ICJ client

'ICJ has allowed clinical nurse specialists more time to focus on patient's clinical care this resulting in a more streamlined and supportive journey for patients and their families.'
- Macmillan Nursing Team

'I've never had to ask for help before, but this was different, I was so overwhelmed. From my first contact I was met with compassion and kindness. I would have no hesitation to recommend this service to anyone who needs it'
- ICJ Client

'from the moment the ICJ link worker got in touch I felt more relaxed and knew there was someone there to help me and my family through this time'
- ICJ Client











COUNSELLING SUPPORT

The counselling service provided by Western Isles Cancer Care Initiative offers vital emotional and psychological support to people affected by cancer and their families across the Western Isles. The service provides a safe, confidential and supportive space where individuals can process the emotional impact of a cancer diagnosis, treatment and recovery, helping them to develop coping strategies and manage feelings such as anxiety, fear, grief and uncertainty.

Importantly, counselling supports people not only during treatment but also as they adjust to life following a cancer diagnosis, helping them rebuild confidence, regain a sense of control and look towards the future. Support for family members is equally important, recognising the significant emotional impact that cancer can have on those close to the person affected. By providing this specialist support within the local community, Western Isles Cancer Care Initiative helps reduce isolation, strengthen resilience and improve emotional wellbeing, enabling people affected by cancer to cope with their experiences and move forward with greater confidence.

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Feedback we have received -

'I cannot speak highly enough of the counsellor I saw, their experience, their personal touch, professionalism and understanding, or of the wider service provided by the Western Isles Cancer Care Initiative. The support I received genuinely helped me at a time when I needed it most and helped me reach a place where I could look forward to life again with optimism for both myself and my children.'

'I can safely say that the counselling I have received (and, thankfully, still receive) has made all the difference: Massive problems are becoming more tolerable and endurable when you do not have to face them on your own but when you have got a competent and compassionate person who you can speak to, who analyses your situation, and who helps you to break the complexity of the situation into several steps (something you are not able to do on your own).

WICCI's support by offering counselling for the bereaved is outstanding and highly beneficial. It is about helping people to help themselves when they are at their lowest point. I do not know where I would be right now, had I not had the blessings of their help and support (and, honestly, I would not even want to start thinking about it). I am deeply indebted to their vital assistance, and I very much doubt that I could have managed without them.'

'I contacted WICCI, unsure of what, if any, support they may be able to provide. My email was met with kindness and an offer of counselling. Everyone I had contact with at the WICCI office were extremely warm, supportive and compassionate.

During my counselling sessions with Helen she supported me to talk about my Mum, the trauma of her short illness and death, and the joyful times we shared. Gradually, I was able to return to work, feel I was managing daily life better and cope with my grief.

Without the support of WICCI and the genuine care of Helen, returning to life following my loss would have been a much lengthier and more difficult process. I cannot express my gratitude enough to all at WICCI.'

'The counselling I received through WICCI was extremely helpful in allowing me to process what had happened and, importantly, to begin moving forward with my life. The professionalism, understanding and compassion shown by the counsellor I saw were exceptional. I never felt judged or pressured, and the support helped me to understand that moving forward did not mean forgetting the past.'

*We are delighted to be supported to deliver this service with funding from the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund (CMHWF) Grant.

* Our counselling is available face to face in Stornoway and Balivanich

ROYAL INVITATION

In 2025, WICCI received a very special invitation to a reception at Buckingham Palace, hosted by Their Majesties The King and The Queen, recognising the important contribution of community-based cancer support.
We were given four invitations and asked to nominate individuals who had made an outstanding contribution to supporting people affected by cancer in their local communities.



Representing WICCI at the reception were Kay Mackinnon, Macmillan Benefits Advisor; Mairi Helen Macdonald, WICCI Trustee; Don Maclean, WICCI Trustee and Secretary and Vice Chair of the Hebridean Men's Cancer Support Group; and Caroline Maciver, WICCI Manager.

The occasion was made even more special when WICCI was selected as one of just five organisations, from the 56 attending, to showcase our work.
This was a tremendous honour and provided a unique opportunity to highlight the importance of community-based cancer support and the difference WICCI makes to people and families affected by cancer across the Western Isles.
We were incredibly proud to represent WICCI and the Western Isles at Buckingham Palace, and to celebrate the dedication of the staff, trustees, volunteers, fundraisers, partners and supporters who make our work possible.













SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT



We appreciated being given the opportunity at The Scottish Parliament to share the specific challenges that people facing cancer in the Western Isles experience. This was as part of the Rural Cancer Communities Project organised by the Farming Community Network (FCN) in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support

As part of the Parliamentary reception, Caroline had the opportunity to speak about the specific and additional challenges people in the Western Isles face when going through cancer diagnosis and treatment, particularly the long and costly travel involved, challenges faced by having fragile transport networks, the strain it places on families, and the emotional impact of being far from home during such a vulnerable time.

Caroline also spoke about the high rate of fuel poverty in the islands and the worry about additional costs for people trying to keeping warm at home. Caroline was also able to share the work of WICCI and how we try to support people in the Western Isles facing these types of issues.

Meeting with other groups involved with supporting rural communities was incredibly valuable, it showed how widely shared our concerns are and how committed people are to improving cancer care across Scotland. Talking about these challenges in front of MSPs felt daunting and emotional but also so important. It was a chance to ensure that the realities faced by island communities are truly seen and heard by people who are in the position to make a difference.

Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) and rural stakeholders from across Scotland committed to greater collaboration to help to address cancer inequalities in farming and rural communities.







MACMILLAN NATIONAL CONFERENCE

In September 2025, Western Isles Cancer Care Initiative (WICCI) was invited to speak at the Macmillan National Conference, leading a workshop and contributing to discussions around the challenges of delivering cancer support in remote and rural communities.



Being invited to share our experience at a national level was a significant recognition of the knowledge and expertise developed through our work supporting people affected by cancer across the Western Isles.

Our presentation highlighted some of the unique challenges faced by people living in the Western Isles, including geographical isolation, travel distances, limited access to specialist services and the additional practical and emotional pressures that can accompany a cancer diagnosis.

We were able to share how WICCI works within this context to provide accessible, local and person-centred non-clinical support, helping to ensure that people affected by cancer and their families do not feel disadvantaged by where they live.

The conference provided an important opportunity to raise awareness of the realities of living with cancer in a rural and island community, while sharing our experience and learning with Macmillan professionals from across the country.

It also reinforced the importance of locally delivered services and the vital role that community organisations such as WICCI play in supporting people throughout their cancer journey.







A FOND FAREWELL

After many years of dedicated service, our long-standing Chairman, Donald Macleod, stepped down from his role in 2025. Donald has been an integral part of Western Isles Cancer Care Initiative (WICCI) since its very beginning and has played a significant role in shaping the charity into the organisation it is today.

From the early stages of establishing WICCI, Donald was instrumental in navigating the complex paperwork, agreements and processes required to establish the charity and develop its partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support. His commitment, knowledge and determination helped lay the foundations for the services we now provide across the Western Isles. Over the years, Donald has provided invaluable leadership and support as WICCI has grown from its beginnings into an established and trusted local cancer support organisation.



Today, WICCI has a team of five employees, offices in both Stornoway and Balivanich, and provides support to people affected by cancer and their families across the Western Isles. Donald can be incredibly proud of the part he has played in that journey. His contribution has helped create a lasting legacy that continues to make a real difference to people living with cancer in our island communities. We would like to express our sincere thanks to Donald for his many years of commitment, hard work and dedication to WICCI, and wish him all the very best.













EVENTS AND OUTREACH



Youth Philanthropy Initiative at Sir E Scott School in Harris.



WICCI Uist & Barra Support Services booklet and new 'Cancer ~ Who Can Help Me?' contact information leaflet, all created and produced in-house.



Cancer - Who Can Help Me? Information Roadshow with Macmillan Cancer Support and Benefits, NHSWI Health Promotion and Western Isles Community Care Forum (WICCF)



Information Stand at Clach Mhìle Surgery, Castlebay



Barra Cancer Support Annual Fundraising Coffee Morning



Regular Gentle Stretch & Relaxation Workshops with Sheila MacDonald



Attending the South Harris Agricultural Show



Trustee DJ Macdonald and Deirdre after their BBC Radio nan Gàidheal interviews



WICCI and Improving the Cancer Journey Presentation for the Church of Scotland Guild

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Partnership working between the Western Isles Cancer Care Initiative, Improving the Cancer Journey (ICJ) the Macmillan Nursing Team, and the Macmillan Benefits Service plays a crucial role in ensuring that people affected by cancer across the Western Isles receive comprehensive, coordinated care. This collaboration allows each service to contribute its unique expertise, creating a holistic support system that addresses not only the clinical needs of patients but also their emotional, practical, and financial wellbeing.

The Macmillan Nurse Team provides specialist clinical care, symptom management, and emotional support, often acting as a consistent point of contact throughout a patient's treatment journey.

At the same time, the Macmillan Benefits Service offers expert guidance on welfare entitlements, helping to reduce the financial strain often associated with a cancer diagnosis by assisting patients and families in accessing benefits, grants, and other forms of financial aid.

The Western Isles Cancer Care Initiative complements these services by offering community-based support, financial grant assistance, and access to therapies and counselling that may otherwise be difficult to reach in remote or island settings.

Through close communication, shared care planning, and mutual referrals, this partnership ensures that care is joined up, and that patients experience a more seamless, streamlined and supportive journey. Ultimately, this integrated approach enhances support, reduces health inequalities, and empowers individuals and their families during one of the most challenging times in their lives.

"The team at Western Isles Cancer Care Initiative have evolved into an extension of our cancer specialist nursing team. They give our patients a seamless service when referred on from a CNS. They have allowed us to free up countless hours of clinical time by offering practical, financial and emotional support. We must also mention the fabulous wig fitting service. We know when we pick up the phone to them that they will do all that they can to support our patients and their families. Their support has become invaluable to our island community." - Mairi Smith, Western Isles Lead Macmillan Nurse.



Western Isles Macmillan Nursing Team



Kay Mackinnon - Macmillan Benefits Service

"WICCI has become a much respected and valued asset to not only the cancer community but their families and carers. WICCI continue to advocate on behalf of the community, this along with a close working relationship between themselves, the Macmillan Benefits Service, Macmillan Nursing Team and ICJ results in the community having a wealth of organisations with knowledge and expertise on hand to always support them." - Kay Mackinnon, Western Isles Macmillan Benefits Service

WHAT OUR CLIENTS SAY

Cancer support can mean different things to different people, as each person's experience with cancer is unique. For some, it may involve emotional counselling or peer support groups, while others may benefit more from practical help like financial advice, help with navigating benefits, or complementary therapies such as oncology massage or reflexology. This is why offering a holistic service—one that considers the emotional, social, physical, and practical aspects of a person's wellbeing—is so beneficial. A holistic approach ensures that individuals can access the kind of support that is most meaningful to them, improving their overall quality of life during and after treatment. WICCI aims to support people in the ways they need when they need it.
Here is what our support meant to some services users in 2025:-





"Through my experiences with cancer and bereavement, I have had contact with a number of different charities and support organisations, all of which provide important and valuable services. However, I can genuinely say that I found WICCI to be particularly helpful and supportive. The personal approach, accessibility and quality of the support I received really stood out.."

"Fantastic, supportive, caring charity. Can't speak highly enough about the work they do."

"The support you provided to my family will never be forgotten.."

"I was nervous the first time I walked into WICCI - I needn't have been as I was met by warm smiles and understanding. I had no idea all the support that WICCI provide and I'm so thankful of that first day I went as it's made such a difference to me"

"The grant paid into our account was such a welcome help for all the extra expenses we have a the moment, we are also so grateful for the heated blanket which has been used daily"

"Your kindness and smiling faces have helped me get through a very challenging time"

'I'm so grateful there is somewhere local and so welcoming for me to come for support and advice'

"My Macmillan Nurse explained what support was available at WICCI including Wig Fitting for while I was going through my Chemo, the lovely hairdresser took so much time to help me find a wig that suited me, it helped me with my confidence at a hard time"

THANK YOU

To all our supporters

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has supported Western Isles Cancer Care Initiative throughout the year. We are incredibly grateful for the many fundraising events and challenges that have taken place, with people giving their time, energy and creativity to raise funds for our charity. From organised events and sponsored challenges to individual fundraising efforts, every contribution makes a real difference and helps us continue providing support to people affected by cancer and their families across the Western Isles.

We are especially grateful to everyone who has chosen to support WICCI during times of personal loss. The families who have asked for donations to be made to WICCI in memory of a loved one, through funeral collections and memorial donations. Every donation, no matter how large or small, helps us to continue our work and ensures that we can be there for others facing cancer in our community.

To every fundraiser, donor, volunteer, family, community group, business and individual who has supported us this year thank you. Your kindness and generosity allow us to continue making a difference to people when they need us most. We simply could not do what we do without you.



THANKS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Remembering Gail Allan



We remember a very special friend and colleague, the Lead Macmillan Nurse in the Western Isles until she retired in May 2025, who sadly passed away in January 2026.

She was a wonderful friend and supporter of our charity, her compassion, kindness and dedication made such a lasting difference to cancer care across the Western Isles. She cared deeply about the people and families she supported, and her work touched so many lives.
We feel incredibly fortunate to have known and worked alongside her, and we will always be grateful for everything she gave to our community.
Her care, her kindness and her legacy will not be forgotten. Our heartfelt thoughts and deepest sympathies are with her husband Jim, her children and all her wider family and loved ones.

Special Thanks

We would like to recognise the support of others who help WICCI every day:

The local **Macmillan Fundraising Committees** who devote so much time and effort to fundraise for Macmillan Cancer Support. .
The Macmillan Nursing Team - We are so thankful for the Team and all they do to support people every day through their cancer journey.
The Hebridean Men's Cancer Support Group, The Uist Men's Cancer Support Group and Barra Cancer Support Group - For all the emotional and financial support that they give to those affected by cancer and their families.
Kay Mackinnon and Caroline Godwin- Macmillan Benefits Service for all their support and hard work supporting people to access the benefits they are entitled to.
Gordon Mclean, Katriona Yule, Shona Dickson and **Margaret Greer** from Macmillan Cancer Support, who have provided amazing support to WICCI in 2025.
Tim Durbin -ICJ Programme Manager, for all his work helping to deliver ICJ in the Western Isles.
UCF Supplies - for generously donating and delivering a ton bag of firewood logs per month to a WICCI client, to help support those in fuel poverty.
Tech Mobile - for all the IT support and advice.
Derek at Hebweb Design - for designing and maintaining our website.
Janet Ross-Jordan - for all her fundraising and support with WICCI Christmas Cards and Carebox items.
To all our care box suppliers for their support, **KJ Macdonald Chemist, Ishga, Stag Bakeries, Cards and Giftwrap, Sandwick Bay Candles** and local author **GR Jordan.**
Harris Hotel, Dark Island Hotel, Christine Campbell, Kilbride Cottage, Lochmaddy Hotel, Daliburgh Thrift Shop, Kildonan Museum, Temple View, Borrodale Hotel, Taigh Sgìre Sholais - For providing free therapy/meeting space and looking after everyone who visits so well.

We would like to note special thanks to the following people -

All our **wonderful therapists** who do so much to support people in the Western Isles.
To our wonderful hairdressers; **Maggie**, **Marianne and Angela** who are providing an invaluable service for ladies who are looking for wig fitting advice and support and to the team at **A&A Studios** for their continued support and guidance. To all our wonderful **knitters** for making such beautiful items to add to our care boxes. And finally to the talented **Arts & Crafts professionals, Sheila Macdonald, Wee Haven & Richard from Willowglen** who have provided a fantastic range of workshops throughout the year, which have been so popular and some wonderful memories and creations made!

LOOKING TO 2026



Reflection

We made huge strides in 2025 with the launch of the **Improving the Cancer Journey** project, giving everyone diagnosed with cancer the opportunity to access personalised support if and when they need it.

We continued developing our **Macmillan Information & Support Service**, which aims to provide practical information and support throughout the Western Isles through a drop in service for anyone who requires support.

Alongside this we continued to listen to peoples needs and develop our support services across the Western Isles so no matter where you live there is support available.

We were so grateful and in awe of all the support given to WICCI by the community throughout the year.

Priorities for 2026

- Continue the development of the Macmillan Information and Support Service to support those who are going through a cancer diagnosis.
- Move to a new community office in Benbecula
- Widening of the Improving the Cancer Journey project to include long term conditions for the Western Isles and providing key support for people newly diagnosed with neurological conditions.
- Building our WICCI Team and maintaining a high level of professionalism, discretion and comfort for those who are affected by cancer.
- Developing a vibrant network of volunteers to assist WICCI to help those who need.
- Continue to advocate for patients and their families and provide a responsive, reliable service.
- Maintaining key relationships with partners and developing new partnerships with those who are supporting those affected by cancer
- Continuation of the WICCI Social Fund through funding from Macmillan Cancer Support, working closely with the local fundraising committees.