



Life Well Lived

Annual Report October 2024-September 2025

Building a compassionate community in Biggar



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1. Welcome from the Chair



Writing our second Annual Report is a special milestone. It gives us the chance to look back on just how far we've come, celebrate everything we've achieved over the past two years, and reflect on the wonderful community that has grown around Life Well Lived. We're incredibly proud of what we've built together and grateful to everyone who has been part of the journey.

As you read about the work of our two groups and the difference they are making, I want to begin by saying thank you to the people who make it all possible – our volunteers.

At Life Well Lived, volunteers are the heart of everything we do. Their generosity, kindness and commitment shape every aspect of our work. Over the past year, our charity has grown in ways we could only have hoped for, reaching more people and creating more opportunities for connection, creativity and support. None of this would have been possible without our volunteers.

Many bring valuable skills and experience from careers in healthcare, education, the arts, community work and many other fields. But what stands out most is not their professional expertise – it is the warmth, compassion and care they bring to every interaction. Whether they are leading a workshop, attending Trustee meeting, welcoming someone with a cup of tea, offering a lift to a session or simply taking the time to sit and listen, they help create the welcoming and supportive environment that makes Life Well Lived so special.

To every volunteer who has supported us on this journey, thank you. Every conversation, every activity, every song sung, every laugh shared and every cup of tea poured has helped build the community we are so proud of today.

Thank you for believing in our vision and for helping to create a place where people feel valued, connected and welcome. You are an essential part of Life Well Lived, and this report is as much a celebration of your contribution as it is of our achievements.

With love,

Iona Goldie, Chair of Trustees



2. How we Began...

Now that we're into our second year as a registered charity, it's a lovely opportunity to reflect on how Life Well Lived, Biggar first began and how much we've grown since then.

Our story began in 2019 following the Biggar Community Council Health and Social Care Survey, which highlighted significant gaps in social and health support across Biggar and the surrounding villages. Conversations with local organisations, healthcare providers, carers and community members confirmed a growing need for accessible support around dementia, long-term health conditions, bereavement, mental health and social isolation.

The challenges faced by rural communities were brought into even sharper focus by the COVID-19 pandemic. Isolation, loss and disconnection affected many people, reinforcing the need for a welcoming space to reconnect with life and one another.

Our first initiative, the Hearts and Voices Community Choir, launched in March 2020 and immediately demonstrated the power of connection through music, attracting 54 participants at its first session. Although lockdown followed just days later, the choir continued online, providing a vital source of friendship and support during an uncertain time.

As restrictions eased, we expanded our work to address the needs we had identified through community consultation. With support from the Scottish Government's Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund, we launched our Friendship and Fun group and our Grief and Loss workshops in 2022. Both were created as welcoming, inclusive spaces where people could connect, share experiences and find support without stigma or labels.

From those early conversations to the thriving community of "Friends" we welcome each week, Life Well Lived has always been shaped by local people, responding to local needs with compassion, creativity and connection at its heart.

♥ 3. Our Vision & Mission

We were granted status as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) which is the new legal form for registered Scottish charities in August 2023. We are registered with OSCR which monitors our activities. Our Financial year runs from 1st October – 30th September. Charity trustees are the people who have general control and management of a charity. Charity trustee duties are at the centre of running a charity. In 2024 one of our founding Trustees, Emma Reid moved away. We owe her a huge debt of gratitude for her energy enthusiasm and creativity. We wish her well. To maintain our small group of Trustees we welcomed Joanne Komar to our midst.

Our current Trustees are:

Kat Cowin, Treasurer

Dave Cowley

Joanne Komar

Iona Goldie, Chair

Together, we envision a community where everyone is supported to live well, grieve well and die well-surrounded by a compassionate and caring neighbours and friends.

We aim to:

1. Reduce social isolation in Biggar area
2. Improve mental wellbeing for our community
3. Build a more compassionate, connected and caring community
4. Help members of the local community live their lives well and fully
5. Help local community and individuals become better equipped to help each other through the hard times which can come with death, dying and bereavement
6. Encourage and stimulate opportunities for conversations about death, loss and grief



We achieve these aims by:

- ★ Developing new health, social and recreational activities for residents of Biggar area
- ★ Working collaboratively with other local groups to promote health and wellbeing activities, avoiding overlap or duplication
- ★ Developing a simple social prescribing model for use by Biggar Medical Practice to ensure diagnosed residents know they have local support
- ★ Involving our young people, businesses and volunteers to build intergenerational links and foster community resilience
- ★ Building confidence in talking about death and supporting those who grieve

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Friendship & Fun



FRIENDSHIP & FUN is a weekly gathering organised by Life Well Lived Biggar.

We enjoy different activities each week, share tea & cake and finish with Singing for Health.

We don't charge and are open to everyone who would benefit from stimulation, company and social interaction.

To discuss whether this group would work for you or a relative then do not hesitate to call **IONA GOLDIE on 07714324978** for a confidential chat.

TRANSPORT: We now have a few lovely volunteer drivers who will be happy to collect anyone who doesn't feel up for the walk. **Just phone IONA number below.**

NEW VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: As our numbers grow we'd like to invite a few more volunteers to join us. The more we have, the less of a burden it is on anyone so if you have one day a month or weekly, let us know. We are particularly looking for those who have experience caring for family members or from a healthcare, special needs or social work background.

Come join us, give something back & have fun!





4. Partnerships

At the heart of our work is our partnership with The Gillespie Centre, which provides a welcoming home for all our gatherings. Having a consistent and familiar venue is incredibly important for many of our attendees, particularly those who already visit the Community Café and feel comfortable in the space. The trust, friendships and sense of belonging that have grown there over the years help create an environment where people feel safe, relaxed and valued from the moment they arrive. Quite simply, The Gillespie Centre feels like home.

Equally important are the wonderful therapists, facilitators and activity leaders who bring our sessions to life. Their professional expertise, experience and compassionate approach help ensure that every gathering is safe, supportive and enjoyable. We are deeply grateful for the knowledge, care and enthusiasm they share so generously, and we are delighted to recognise the following superstars who make such difference to our community:



Anna Ludwig, Music Therapist
Alex Saunders, Live for Dance Educator
Tina Mashford, Special Needs and PE Teacher
Leisa Randall, Educational Psychologist & Grief Recovery Specialist



Mum loved attending the group and felt truly welcomed. Friday was a highlight of the week – there would always be a story to listen to or a wee gift that she had made. You gave her joy and a touch of silliness – simple pleasures and company. We cannot thank you enough.

I have been struggling for years to come to terms with the losses in my life. I feel so much relief now – I just feel lighter and more at peace. Thank you.

Highlights & Feedback

- 48 sessions of Friendship & Fun
- 8 Grief Café Gatherings
- Welcomed 14 valued volunteers
- Supported around 98 individuals from Biggar & beyond

Coming to the Grief café has given me time out of my busy life to stop and properly think about Dad and all he meant to me. I really value these sessions and the kindness of the group.

I don't know how you come up with all the ideas but it's clear how much work you all put in. Thank you.

I didn't think I would like the group and didn't think I was "at that stage" but I thoroughly enjoy everything about my Fridays. I haven't laughed so much in years

5. Programs & Impact

FRIENDSHIP & FUN

Overview

Friendship & Fun is a weekly, all-ages gathering designed to support individuals who may need some additional support to live well and fully. We do not ask for any health details but are often told what brings our Friends to us. Our Friends may have dementia, Parkinsons, stroke, COPD, mental health conditions, bereavement, poor mobility and difficulty walking, loss of sight, social isolation and loneliness. Taking place in an accessible, welcoming environment, the group combines gentle stimulation, social connection, and joyful expression.



Each session includes a varied programme of activities — from creative workshops and memory games to light movement and seasonal crafts — always accompanied by tea, cake, and warm conversation. The session closes with **Singing for Health**, a truly enjoyable element of our group shown to benefit both emotional wellbeing and improve cognitive function.

Aims of the Group

To create a supportive, social environment where everyone feels seen and valued

To reduce the emotional and physical impacts of isolation, especially for older adults and carers

To provide gentle stimulation for people living with dementia and Parkinson's

To promote intergenerational engagement and community connection

To use music and creativity as tools for wellbeing and self-expression

Participation and Delivery

Sessions Held: 48 weekly sessions all year round

Attendance: Attendance remained consistently strong throughout the year, with 1,470 attendances recorded across 48 sessions. Average attendance was 34 people per session, peaking at 47 attendees in December 2024. Most sessions attracted between 31 and 40 participants, demonstrating sustained community engagement and interest in the programme.

Participants:

Older adults living with chronic or life limiting conditions, mental health challenges or social isolation

Carers and family members

Community volunteers and younger attendees

Facilitators: Team of experienced volunteers bringing teaching, caring and healthcare expertise, guest activity leaders and arts therapists.



Activities Offered

Reminiscence and storytelling; Seasonal arts & crafts; Brain games and Quizzes, Unique sensory experiences, Seated movement, dance and stretching; Tea, cake, and informal social time. We finish with **Singing for Health** —vocal exercises devised for good lung health and benefit those with breathing issues, including COPD and long COVID. We sing a mix of familiar and learn new songs to help to keep the brain active. We are included on the Luminate Scotland Dementia Inclusive Singing Group Map.

Impact and Outcomes

Emotional and Social Wellbeing

Participants report feeling happier, more connected, and more motivated after attending. Many go on to meet up out with the group with newfound friendships. Carers note improvements in their loved ones' mood and engagement. For many, this is their main weekly social contact — a lifeline in combating loneliness.

Feedback

"The room is filled with so much laughter and chatter every week – it's so much fun."

"We do so many things I'd never have thought about – I wore a full red beard and laughed like a pirate last week you know!"



Cognitive and Physical Benefits

Singing and rhythm-based activities support memory recall and verbal expression

Seated movement and dance improve mobility and reduce stiffness

Creative tasks encourage hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills

Community and Inclusion

The group is fully inclusive, with an emphasis on dignity and mutual respect

Intergenerational contact has increased understanding and joy across age groups through outreach with Biggar High School. We now welcome Duke of Edinburgh student volunteers and groups working towards their Youth Philanthropy Initiative.

Volunteers gain meaningful connection and skills and a sense of purpose that their career skills are still valid even though they may have retired.

Next Steps

Secure funding to continue offering free attendance, refreshments, and live music. We wish to continue involving our participants in the future programme through regular evaluation and feedback sessions. We also like to offer training to volunteers in dementia-friendly communication and facilitation. It would be good to extend our offering to another day of the week.

Conclusion

The Friendship & Fun Group offers more than activities — it provides belonging, joy, and dignity. Through shared laughter, song, and simple pleasures, the group is a bright thread in the week for those who attend. It is a model of compassionate community support in action, and a testament to the power of connection at every stage of life.



EXPLORING DEATH LOSS & CHANGE

Overview

Following feedback and community research, we shifted to a more informal style of grief gathering in a café setting. With no set agenda or presenters, the sessions are gently facilitated to allow conversation to flow naturally. This approach offers a compassionate, peer-supported space in a relaxed, non-clinical environment where participants can share and connect at their own pace.



Objectives

- Create a safe, welcoming environment for open dialogue around death, dying, bereavement, and life transitions
- Reduce social isolation and emotional distress related to grief and loss
- Promote personal growth, resilience, and meaning making
- Encourage a compassionate community approach to end-of-life matters

Participation and Engagement

- **Café gatherings Held: 8**
- **Total Participants attending one or more: 18**
- **Average Attendance per Session: 10**
- **Regular informal 1:1 session held to provide comfort, understanding and explain the benefits of the group setting**

Participant Profile:

- Adults aged 25–85
- Mix of bereaved individuals, carers
- Many repeat participants, building trust and friendship over time

Impact and Outcomes

Emotional Wellbeing:

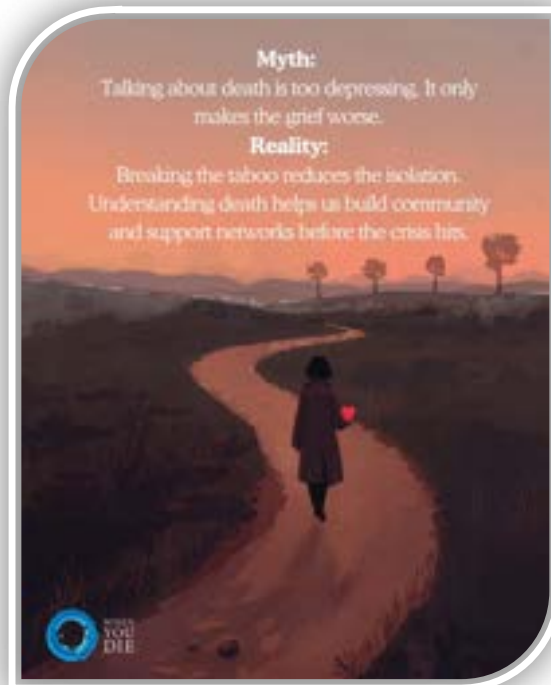
- 100% of participants reported feeling “safe” in discussing their emotions
- Participants expressed reduced feelings of isolation and improved capacity to talk openly about their loss

Social Connection:

- Gatherings fostered a sense of belonging and mutual care, especially valued by those living alone or recently bereaved
- Several informal support networks have formed organically among regular attendees

Learning and Reflection:

- Participants reported increased confidence in discussing death with family and friends
- Many expressed new perspectives on how to prepare emotionally and practically for end-of-life



Feedback:

"I didn't know how much I needed this until I came. It's helped me feel less alone."

"It's not morbid at all – it's rich, warm, real. I leave each time feeling more alive."

"I've been carrying guilt and hurt for so long, but now I feel lighter, relieved."

Next Steps

- Continue monthly gatherings into 2026
- Create a resource booklet or podcast to expand reach and legacy
- Plan a community event to develop reach



Conclusion

The regular Grief Café gatherings have provided a safe and welcoming space where people can explore and process their grief alongside others who understand. By encouraging open conversations about death, loss, and life's changes, these sessions help foster a more compassionate community—one where grief is acknowledged, stories are shared, and no one must navigate loss in isolation. The wider community are recognising our work, community link worker with NHS refers regularly and informal meetings out with the session are held most weeks. Finding the balance between educational events and “holding space” is our goal.

6. Financial Summary

Opening Balance: £8093.38

Income: £29,580

Expenditure: £17,473.90

Reserves carried forward: £ 20,199.48

We strive to be as inclusive as possible and want to keep our groups affordable or ideally free to attend. That would not have been possible this year if we didn't have the generous grant from:

 **sse** SSE Renewables Clyde Windfarm - £19,400

We also received a very generous anonymous donation as a thank you for our work. And in a lovely gesture, Biggar High School donated £150. Their Youth Philanthropy Team who chose our Death Loss and Change Group as their charity won the school public vote for their very brave and emotional presentation of our work.

Both the substantial charitable grant and the individual donations have been so valued, and we are very truly touched. Thank you all - your support has made such a difference to the health and wellbeing of this community.





7.Looking Ahead

- Our plans are to continue with our varied and stimulating programme for **Friendship and Fun**, spreading the word through GP and other health bodies locally. We welcome newcomers both as Friends and Volunteers. Come along and make a difference in our wee town.
- We plan to widen the access to our **Death and Grief** awareness by continuing our monthly café where anyone can drop in to be in a safe space to explore their feelings and emotions no matter what their loss. We also plan to begin a podcast series to widen our reach.
- Organisationally we are looking to strengthen our volunteer network and introduce additional administrative support to allow us to grow and deliver new services for the area which might fill a gap in health and wellbeing provision. Watch this space!

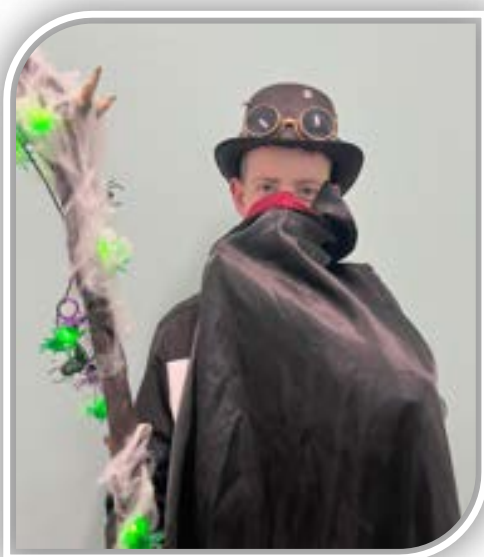


9.Thank You

We thank our Trustees, grant and individual donors, partners, activity leaders, participants and the community for making our work possible. This is teamwork at its best. Our community is more inclusive, kind and compassionate because of you.



10. Our Gallery of a Life Well Lived





*Life Well Lived brings people
together to build a
compassionate, connected
community where everyone
can live well, grieve well and
die well*



Life Well Lived