



Annual Report 2025 / 26





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Welcome and Introduction

Hello from our new office base in Hamilton, a fresh chapter after 20 wonderful years at Clydeview in Blantyre.

As one (literal!) door closes, another opens. Our move marks a change of address, but our purpose remains the same: working alongside local people to build stronger communities and make sure support reaches those who need it.

There's change, and there's continuity. We'll continue to target our work on the most deprived neighbourhoods in South Lanarkshire while delivering activities, such as our Climate Action Festival, across Hamilton, Larkhall, and Blantyre

Our community hubs continue to show the real value of bringing people together. Through friendship and conversation, practical help and access to vital services, they provide places where people can feel welcome, supported and connected.

Food has continued to play an important part in our work too. Cooking and eating together brings people into the room, starts conversations and builds relationships, while helping people develop the skills and confidence to make healthy, affordable and sustainable dietary choices.

Our week-long Climate Action Festival captured much of what Community Links is about: practical, positive and full of community energy. Recycling, repurposing, reducing food waste and sharing ideas showed how practical changes in everyday life can make a difference.

We've also seen again what can happen when local people have a say in shaping the places where they live. Throughout the year we have strengthened local relationships, enabled community influence on local decision-making and participatory budgeting, and helped people develop useful skills. Along the way there has been plenty of learning, creativity, laughter and growing confidence.

Of course, it hasn't been an easy year for our sector. Funding is increasingly difficult to secure, while the need for services continues to grow. That means organisations like Community Links have to make every pound work hard, while continuing to make the case for proper investment in the services local people rely on.

Finally, we want to thank everyone who has been part of Community Links over the past year: our staff, volunteers, partners, funders, community members and supporters. Your commitment and energy are what keep Community Links rooted in and responsive to the communities we serve.

This report gives you a flavour of what that collective effort has achieved over the past year. I hope you enjoy reading it and we look forward to continuing the journey from our new home in Hamilton.



Julie Dunn | Chairperson



Morag Pinion | Chief Officer

About Community Links

Community Links is an independent community anchor organisation, established in 2002. Our mission is to empower and uplift our communities through three key roles:

SERVICE PROVISION - delivering services to improve outcomes for local people and keep our staff connected with our communities.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT - providing professional support to help communities transform their ideas into impactful projects.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - facilitating conversations between communities and service providers to enhance local services and outcomes.

We are a value-based organisation, and this is reflected in how we deliver our services and interact with the communities we serve.

Our values are:

INCLUSION

COMMITMENT

RESPECT

INNOVATION

VIBRANCE



Julie Dunn
Chairperson



Jim Reid
Co-Vice-Chair



Emma Barnes
Co-Vice-Chair



Robert McKean
Director



Anna Shanks
Director



Megan McCullagh
Director



Morag Pinion
Chief Officer



Anne Marie Lyons Neil
Business Support Officer



Iain Mac
Operational Lead



Liz Armour
Community Development
Officer



Colin Duff
Project Lead and
Business Development



Climate Action

Climate action has now been an important part of Community Links' work with communities across South Lanarkshire for several years. Our approach to climate action has remained consistent with the way we have always worked: starting with local people, listening to what matters to them and supporting practical action that makes sense within their communities.

Climate change is a global challenge, but the ways in which people can respond to it are often very local. Alongside the action taken by governments and industry, communities can contribute through the choices they make, the resources they share and the things they do collectively.



Community Links' role is not to decide what communities should do, but to help people explore what climate change means locally, to generate ideas and to design community-level actions that are realistic, relevant and achievable. Over the past year we have continued to create opportunities for people to get involved through activities that connect climate action with everyday life, from reducing waste and reusing resources, to sustainable food choices, growing, sharing and learning new skills.

By making climate action practical and accessible, we want to help communities turn awareness into activity while ensuring that local people continue to shape what happens in their own neighbourhoods.

Feel the Warmth Partnership

Community Links partnered with Feel the Warmth CIC, a social enterprise working to help people experiencing fuel poverty stay warm through practical, affordable solutions. Together, we distributed innovative, low-energy heat pads to people in local communities.

The portable pads are powered by rechargeable power banks and can be placed inside a cushion or worn underneath clothing, providing warmth directly to the person rather than to the entire room. This offers a practical, energy-efficient way to keep warm while using very little electricity. Feedback from recipients was positive, with people describing how the pads helped them keep warm and cut bills and, in some cases, provided welcome relief from joint and mobility problems.

The partnership provided another example of how relatively simple new technologies can connect climate action with an immediate everyday benefit; helping people stay warm while reducing the need to heat the whole home.

Winter Warmers

Our Winter Warmers brought practical climate action together with support for people facing the pressures of keeping warm through the winter. Events in Hamilton, Larkhall, and Blantyre provided free warm clothing and useful items such as hot water bottles and draught excluders, alongside hot food and refreshments.

The project encouraged a simple 'heat the person, not the home' approach, helping people stay comfortable while reducing unnecessary energy use and household costs. Donated and second-hand winter clothing also gave useful items a new home rather than allowing them to go to waste.

We also worked with partner organisations to include support around home energy use and saving money, alongside practical demonstrations and workshops exploring climate and energy issues.

Our Winter Warmers showed how climate action can connect directly with people's everyday concerns, keeping warm, keeping bills manageable, reducing waste and making better use of the resources we already have.

Make a Meal Of It

Working in partnership with Dunns Food & Drinks, we delivered a series of Make A Meal Of It sessions at the company's Innovation Kitchen, led by Head Chef Donnie Munro.

The sessions brought small groups of local people together to explore how good food can also be affordable and more sustainable. Participants learned how to prepare tasty meals using local and seasonal ingredients, alongside practical ways to reduce food waste, use less energy when cooking and make the most of the food they buy.

The small-group format gave people the opportunity to learn directly from a professional chef, ask questions and pick up techniques they could put into practice at home. Participants left sessions with a goodie bag of locally-sourced ingredients, allowing them to recreate the meals themselves and share what they had learned with their families.

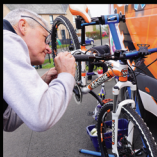
Make A Meal Of It connects climate action with something everyone understands- the food we cook and eat every day- while helping people build practical skills, save money and reduce waste.



Climate Action Festival

Following the success of our first Climate Action Festival in 2025, Community Links brought the Festival back in April 2026 with an expanded programme shaped by what we had learned and by the ideas and suggestions of people who took part the previous year.

Supported by The National Lottery Awards for All Fund, the Festival ran across a week in early April and offered a week of free activities designed to make climate action interesting, accessible and relevant to everyday life. Rather than expecting people to come along simply because an event was about climate change, we created opportunities to engage through things people already enjoy and care about; food, family activities, fun, creativity, practical skills and getting outdoors.



Food provided one of the most immediate ways of exploring climate action. Special Festival editions of Make a Meal Of It were joined by a Community Cook Out, exploring sustainably sourced ingredients and cooking without mains electricity or fossil fuels, and Eat Wild! Foraging for Food, which guided people to explore their environment, find the natural foodstuffs available locally, and to learn about seasonal edible plants and responsible, sustainable harvesting.

Learning new skills was another important strand. Introduction to Woodwork and Superhero Woodwork demonstrated the potential of reclaimed materials while giving people the opportunity to develop practical woodworking skills and make useful items to take home. Traditional Crafts – Knitting, Sewing and Crocheting similarly connected creativity and practical skills with repairing, reusing and extending the life of things we already have.

Science provided another route into the subject. A free Glasgow Science Centre Trip gave a full busload of local people the opportunity to explore science, technology and climate through interactive exhibits and experiences, while Silly Science events in both Larkhall and Blantyre brought fun, hands-on science activities for children directly into local communities.

For families, one of the week's biggest events was BikeFest Larkhall, held at Chalmers Church. The free family day brought together cycling and active travel with practical climate activities. Bike skills, safety and marking sat alongside bike repair and recycling, upcycling crafts, food-waste activities, games and other opportunities to learn about sustainability. Bookbug in the Park used stories, songs and the outdoor setting of Chatelherault Country Park to introduce babies, toddlers and their families to nature in a fun and familiar way. The Bathtub Bees workshop created beautiful, pollinator-friendly planters and provided another playful way for children and families to engage with nature and biodiversity.



What tied this very varied programme together was a simple idea: there is no single 'right' way into climate action. For some people the starting point might be reducing food waste or repairing something rather than replacing it; for others it might be cycling, cooking, science, wildlife or learning a new craft. By offering different ways to participate, we wanted people who might never attend a conventional 'climate event' to find something in the Festival that interested them.

The 2026 Festival built on the foundations laid in 2025, but it was not simply a repeat of the previous year. By listening to participants and learning from our first Festival, we were able to develop a broader programme and find new, and more effective, ways of connecting climate action with the interests and everyday lives of local people.



Once again, the Community Links Climate Action Festival culminated in a large-scale Climate Action Family Fun Day at Glenlee Primary School in Burnbank.

Families enjoyed a mix of climate-themed activities alongside all the attractions of a traditional family fun day. Glasgow Science Centre Outreach Team returned with a collection of interactive exhibits, this year exploring wonders of the human body, while other activities gave children and adults opportunities to learn, experiment, get creative and think about climate and sustainability in an informal and enjoyable setting.

There were bouncy castles, games and other family attractions. The Scottish weather inevitably decided to make its own contribution to proceedings: high winds on the day meant the bouncy castles had to be moved indoors at short notice. Fortunately, the change of plan did little to dampen the atmosphere and the activities continued safely inside.



The Fun Day has become an important part of the Festival because it allows Community Links to reach people who might never choose to attend an event specifically about climate change. Families come along to enjoy themselves, but while they are there they encounter new ideas, activities and conversations which can provide a starting point for thinking about climate action in their own lives and communities.

The 2025 Fun Day helped Community Links gather ideas from local people about what they wanted to see next. Those conversations fed directly into the development of the 2026 Festival, helping us move from a successful first year towards a programme increasingly shaped by the interests and suggestions of the communities taking part.

Things can only get hotter for our 2027 fun day!







Your Community Hubs

Your Community Hubs provide welcoming, informal places where local people can meet, enjoy something to eat and drink, and find support when they need it. Based in familiar community buildings within the priority neighbourhoods we serve, the Hubs combine the simple things that bring people together- conversation, good company and home cooking - with access to a wide range of practical help.

Delivered alongside our partners Burnbank Community Hub, Hareleeshill Community Hub and Strutherhill & Birkenshaw Action Group, the Hubs are particularly valuable because they bring services to people in places where they already feel comfortable. This helps overcome some of the practical barriers and the apprehension that can prevent people from approaching services through more formal routes.

Financial advice continues to be an important part of the offer. Regular free drop-in sessions give people access to trained advisers who can help with benefits, budgeting, money worries and other financial issues in a relaxed and confidential environment. Free Wi-Fi and access to laptops also help people get online and access digital information and services.



Health and wellbeing are woven through Hub activities too. Alongside information and advice on issues such as smoking, alcohol, mental health, nutrition and hydration, people are encouraged to get involved in activities including walking, gardening, healthy cooking, active travel and enjoying local green spaces.



The Hubs also provide a natural setting for Community Links' growing climate work, creating opportunities to talk about climate change, reducing waste and energy use, and the practical actions that individuals and communities can take.

Above all, the Hubs are social spaces. People don't need to turn up looking for a service or bringing a problem that needs to be solved. They can simply come in for a coffee, something to eat and some company. From those everyday conversations, relationships and trust grow and, when someone does need a little more help, the right support is much easier to reach.

YOUR COMMUNITY HUBS

Brew 'n' Blether

Chalmers Church
Robert Smillie Crescent, Larkhall - Wednesdays 10:00- 1:00pm

Hillhouse Community Hub

Hillhouse Parish Church
Clarkwell Road, Hamilton - Thursdays 11:00am- 1:30pm

Burnbank Community Hub

Gilmour and Whitehill Parish Church
86 Burnbank Centre, Hamilton - Fridays 10:00am- 1:00pm

Community Corner

Harelesshill Community Hub
21 Howard Street, Larkhall - Fridays 10:00am- 1:00pm

Neighbourhood Planning

Community Links continued to work alongside South Lanarkshire Council to support Our Place Our Plan neighbourhood planning in two areas: Hillhouse, Udston & Burnbank and Strutherhill & Birkenshaw.

Our Place Our Plan gives local people a direct role in identifying the issues that matter in their neighbourhoods and working with public services to address them. Community Links provides community development, capacity building and practical support to the local groups that help turn these priorities into action.

In Strutherhill & Birkenshaw, 14 residents participated in the Community Group during the year. Residents used the Group to raise issues including community safety, road and pedestrian safety, fly-tipping, drainage, potholes, lighting and improvements to local parks.

The year also demonstrated how neighbourhood planning can lead to practical community action. Concerns about fly-tipping and difficulties disposing of larger household items contributed to the development of a community Skip Initiative. Twelve local volunteers helped plan and deliver the initiative, with 76 residents filling four skips and further doorstep collections provided by the Community Payback team and volunteers.



The Community Group has also helped support the development of the Strutherhill & Birkenshaw Action Group and its weekly Brew 'n' Blether community café, which attracts around 30 people each week and provides opportunities for social connection, volunteering, access to support and a little bit of Qigong!

In Hillhouse, Udston & Burnbank, the Community Stakeholder Group continued to bring residents together with community organisations, elected members and public agencies. Eight residents became involved during 2025/26, all of whom were new to neighbourhood planning. The Group discussed and supported work around housing, community safety, youth services, active travel, food support, financial wellbeing and local health and wellbeing.

Community Links also supported substantial exercises to refresh the priorities in both neighbourhoods. 808 residents and local school pupils took part across the two areas: 258 in Strutherhill & Birkenshaw and 550 in Hillhouse, Udston & Burnbank. In Strutherhill & Birkenshaw, Physical Environmental Improvements emerged as the highest priority, while More Leisure, Recreational and Social Opportunities was ranked first in Hillhouse, Udston & Burnbank.

This work helps keep neighbourhood planning grounded in the experiences and perceptions of local people, providing routes for residents to raise concerns, influence local priorities, work directly with public services and develop community-led responses.

Participatory Budgeting

Community Links continued to support Participatory Budgeting work on behalf of South Lanarkshire Council, giving local people a direct say in how funding is invested in their communities. Two separate Participatory Budgeting exercises were delivered during 2025/26, with funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and South Lanarkshire Council.

In Strutherhill & Birkenshaw, £18,600 was available for local projects. Thirteen applications were received, seven from first-time applicants, with seven projects fully funded and one partially funded. 667 local people took part in the public vote, casting 1,785 votes for the projects they wanted to support.

In Hillhouse, Udston & Burnbank, £27,900 was available. Again, 13 applications were received, including six from first-time applicants. Twelve projects were fully funded and one partially funded. 403 residents participated in the vote, casting 1,209 votes.

Across the two neighbourhoods, that meant £46,500 invested in community projects, 26 applications received and 1,070 residents directly involved in deciding where the money should go. Participatory Budgeting puts local people at the heart of decisions about their neighbourhood, not just identifying priorities, but having a direct say in which ideas receive funding.



Community Kitchen

On the last Thursday of every month, Community Links works in partnership with Hamilton Islamic Centre to provide 100 free hot meals to local people experiencing financial hardship, food insecurity or the continuing pressures of rising living costs.



The meals are freshly prepared by volunteer chefs at Hamilton Islamic Centre and distributed through Community Links and our network of trusted local partners. Working in this way helps us reach people who might benefit from a little extra support, including those who may not otherwise approach a food security service themselves.

Partner organisations can refer people to the project, while self-referrals and nominations from friends, family members or neighbours are also welcomed. All referrals are handled confidentially, helping people access the service discreetly and with dignity.

Hamilton Health and Social Care Forum

The Hamilton Health and Social Care Forum gives local residents, patients, carers and community groups a voice in planning and improving health and social care services across Hamilton, Blantyre and Larkhall, working alongside the South Lanarkshire Health and Social Care Partnership.

Community Links provides the practical support that keeps the Forum working — organising meetings, coordinating engagement and helping to connect local people and community organisations with the people responsible for planning and delivering health and social care services. We also work with Forum members and partners to produce useful public resources, helping ensure that local knowledge and experience inform both the conversations taking place and the information available to communities.

It was a busy year of change behind the scenes, with several new faces joining NHS Lanarkshire and the South Lanarkshire University Health and Social Care Partnership. The Forum therefore spent time building new relationships and reshaping its meeting agendas to keep discussions focused on the issues that matter most to local people.



A particular highlight was the distribution of the second edition of the Positive Pathway for Mental Health and Wellbeing booklet. More than 1,000 printed copies of the directory were distributed across Hamilton, Blantyre and Larkhall, helping local people find information about the mental health and wellbeing support available to them.

Producing and distributing the new edition was a real partnership effort and demonstrated one of the Forum's practical strengths: bringing together local knowledge and strong community connections to help people find the right support when they need it.



Remembering Alasdair McKinlay

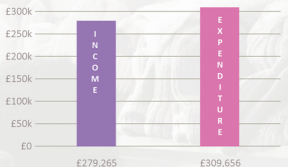
We remember with great fondness Alasdair McKinlay, a valued friend and supporter of Community Links for more than 24 years, who sadly died earlier this year.

Alasdair (pictured left) devoted much of his career in Scottish Government to strengthening communities and ensuring that local people had a meaningful voice in the decisions that affect them. He played an important role in designing Scotland's approach to community empowerment, including the development of the National Standards for Community Engagement and the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, both of which still shape the work of Community Links every day.

Perhaps more importantly to those of us who knew him, Alasdair genuinely believed in the communities behind the policies. He made a point of getting out of government offices, visiting neighbourhoods, listening to local people and encouraging colleagues and Ministers to do the same.

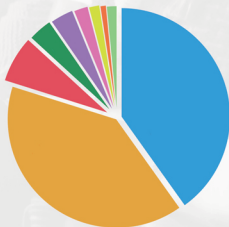
All of us at Community Links were fortunate to know Alasdair not simply as a civil servant, but as a friend, funder, and champion of our work. He will be greatly missed, but the influence of his contributions will continue to be felt across Scotland.

Income and Expenditure



Community Links free reserves, i.e. those not tied up in fixed assets, nor relating to restricted funds, as of 31st March 2026, amounted to £111,613. These reserves are in line with the policy of maintaining a minimum of three months' running costs, including potential statutory redundancy payments.

A full copy of the certified accounts- prepared by our accountants, Kilbryde & Co. can be obtained on request.



- Scottish Government Investing in Communities - £112,110
- SLC Community Engagement Team - £110,896
- National Lottery Awards for All - £19,458
- PB Funding - £9,958
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund - £9,632
- NHS Lanarkshire Hamilton Health and Social Care Forum - £5,950
- VASLan Powerlines - £4,500
- Small Donations - £2,496
- Income Generation - £4,265

Thank You!

Everything Community Links has achieved over the past year has been made possible through the support of its partners, supporters, volunteers, and the communities it serves. Over the past year, your encouragement, partnership, and commitment have helped us continue supporting local people and strengthening communities across South Lanarkshire.

We'd also like to extend a special thank you to our volunteers. The time, enthusiasm, and compassion you bring to our work have a lasting impact on the people and communities we serve. Your contribution helps create stronger connections, brighter opportunities, and more welcoming neighbourhoods.

Our Funders



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot



Our Supporters and Partners

ASDA Blantyre and Hamilton Community Champions | Bsolve Dental
Buchanan McPherson Colour Printers | Cambuslang Apiary Project
Church at the Cross, Larkhall | Country Shop, Blantyre
Dunn's Food and Drinks | Earnock Residents' Association | Feel the Warmth CIC
Hamilton C.A.B. | Hamilton Health and Social Care Forum
Hareleeshill Community Hub | Harvest Church, Hamilton
Hillhouse Link Tenants and Residents Association | Hillbank Parish
Kilbryde and Co. | Lanarkshire Climate Action Hub
Larkhall Community Growers | Larkhall Lighthouse | LDVG | NHS Lanarkshire
Police Scotland | S.A.B. Action Group | Scottish Fire and Rescue
South Lanarkshire Council | South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture
Supporting Our Community (SOC) | Third Sector Chief Officers Group | VASLAN





**COMMUNITY
LINKS**

INVOLVING COMMUNITIES



Community Links
CLIMATE ACTION

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